Maou na Ore to Fushihimeno Yubiwa Volume 3

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魔王なオレと不死姫（グール）の指輪3

柑橘ゆすら

イラスト●しゅがすく

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HJ文庫

HOBBY JAPAN

キリッとしたシャープな眼差しに
メガネが良く似合う女性であった。
（第一話 とある夏休みの出来事）

「... GOOD GRIEF, HOW LONG YOU WILL KEEP SLEEPING?.」
NEAT WHITE SWIMWSUIT WITH A PAREO
PAPER-THIN BIKINI WITH CLOTH AREA REDUCED TO THE LIMITS
「... CHIHARU? DO YOU FEEL WELL?」
「AH-ONIICHAN, TIME TO WAKE UP...♪」
CHARMING SHELL BIKINI
(第1話 ようこそ魔界へ!)

「アイリス！」
翼を失ったアイリスは重力の赴くまま、
凄まじい速度で落下して行く。
（第六話　終わりの始まり）

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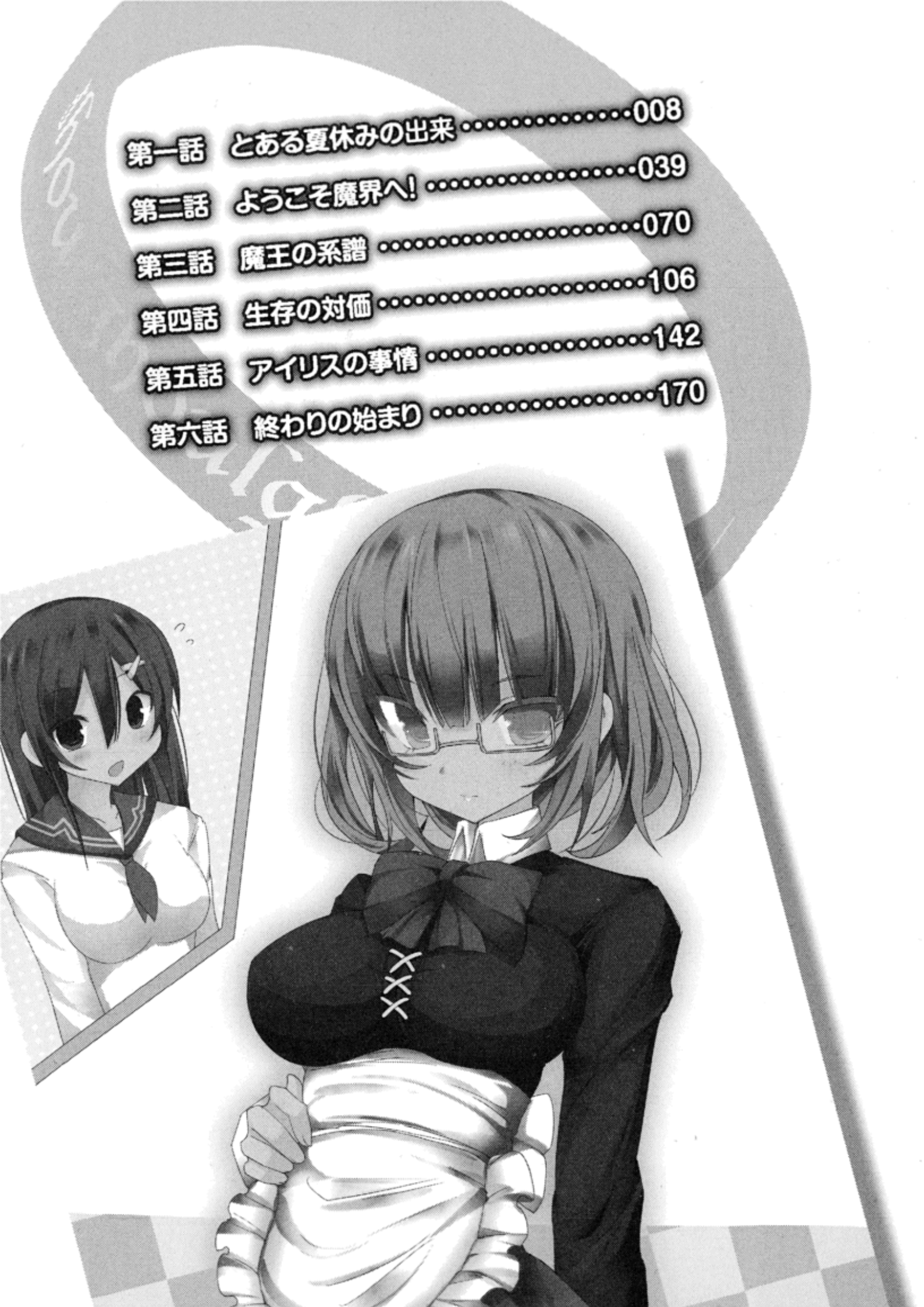

Prologue

Opening my eyes, before me was a plain of sea.

The scent of tides. Wave after wave occurring repeatedly in the sea.

Looking up, oddly muscular seagulls enjoyed their trip through the sky.

Not bad.

Though some abnormalities were presented, but when mentioning the sea, what comes to mind would be summer vacation, and a scene of girls in swimsuits any healthy male student would look forward to.

Um. Thus said.

After affirming the kind of development of being on an unknown island after opening up the eyes for awhile.

This is quite heart-wrenching indeed.

Moreover.....in front of me, problems kept piling up as mountains high enough to obstruct my vision.

“.....Um. You’re finally awake.”

Shifting my head towards the familiar sounding voice, I spotted a person I’m familiar with.

Iris Scarlet Lindwurm.

The person who I am talking to is a Red Dragon girl; she was wearing a cute pink and white laced swimsuit, and released such irregular cuteness that you'd want to promptly take her home and use her as a body pillow.

“.....”

I'm curious about why Iris's choice in swimsuit is so girlishly cute, but there’s something more important I needed to ask right now.

“That. No good. It appears that my.....memory is a bit fuzzy.....”

Um. For starters.

“Where’s this place?”

Saying the same thing as before, I had no issue with going to the sea, it would be better to say that I was eager to. But the current problem is “I can’t remember how did I arrive here.”.

“Huhuhu. Speaking of which, this is a first for you.”

Iris, with the same attitude as before, said some astonishing facts.

“——This is of course the demon world.”

“.....”

Um. I had an inkling.

Though I had an inkling, still I couldn’t help but think you guys were pulling a prank on me.

Looking carefully, some subtle changes could be seen in the sun’s shape, though I tried to avoid looking, the seagulls (?) in the sky, they seem to have easily been the same size as a small helicopter.

In the end, how come I am spending my summer vacation in the demon world?

I slowly reviewed all the events up until this point.

Chapter 1 - Events of a certain summer

Having the long, long test period end, the students at Seiran Academy welcomed the summer holidays.

High school sophomores & summer holidays.

Has there ever been another more exciting combination?

My classmate Youhei said so. Something like this is the season when chances are the highest for boys and girls in their teens to have their first experience.

Now that he said it, I have to agree.

Currently, we are high school sophomores.

Next year we'll end up in the front lines preparing for the entrance exams.

Come to that… There's no way we'll have time for something like romance.

For this reason… Isn't being a high school sophomore a chance in several ways?

So that our hearts when preparing for the exams, like a last-minute proposal for rising taxes, get set free.

Life is short.

Us male high school students cannot but dearly treasure this one last chance given by the gods.

That's why…

"How can it be…"

Though one week has passed since the start of summer vacation, honestly, until now, I've only spent unproductive time alone at home.

… That's natural.

My lodger Zonmi is weak against heat, so she absolutely can't go out.

My best friend Youhei, having disturbed the firework show at the recent summer festival, has been put under house arrest by the school.

Having had both my two top choices of people to hang out with cut off, I can't help but be dragged into the lifestyle of a NEET.

"… Well, what do I do today?"

Since no matter how much I worry there's no way out, let's totally change my mindset.

While sprawled over my bed, when I stretched my limbs with a 'mmm', an idea flashed through my mind.

Ring.

Before my eyes I have my second Contract Ring I got just the other day shining with a silvery color.

Some days ago, after Zonmi the ghoul, I sealed a contract with Kyouko the Nephilim.

Why don't I try it?… Summon.

Come the time I have to use her as a battle partner, though I've seen it a couple of times, I've never experienced it myself. Monster tamers have the possibility to call forth their contracted partner any time they like.

Yosh, it's decided. Let's summon her.

I-it's not like I'll call Kyouko to have someone to talk with to kill the excess free time… Now that I think of it, do I have any other choice?

Better safe than sorry.

That said, since it can be that things don't go smoothly when I have to use it, I must practice now that I have the time.

“Summon—Nephilim.”

Readying myself, I loudly shouted towards the ring.

Thereupon, the ring emitted a dazzling light that covered the inside of the room.

Ooh… It seems it worked somehow.

Soon, from inside the light emerged a familiar silhouette.

“…”

“…”

Suddenly.

An uncomfortable silence settled on the surroundings, as if time had stopped.

No wonder I became as stiff as if I had been put under a stone spell.

The summoned Kyouko, seemingly being completely immersed in her personal time, was in a state where she wore nothing but her undies.

… Could she have been reading on top of her bed?

On Kyouko’s hands were the opened pages of a fashion magazine.

Engrossed in reading the magazine, she was lying face down sucking on a popsicle… In a word, defenseless.

Humm. I didn’t know.

Kyouko follows such a loose lifestyle while at home…

I’ll never admit it to the person herself, but above her underwear a peek of her cute butt crack was showing itself.

“… Ah, ah, ah.”

Crying without making a sound as if saying “it’s the end of the world”, Kyouko’s face paled.

Soon, her embarrassment rushing to its peak, her face becoming bright red,

“Do-dododo… Don’t look at me, moroooooooon!”

She gathered her strength and hit me.

At full force.

I think that was perhaps not at full force.

“Guoh!?”

Taking Kyouko’s fist head on, my body was sent through the wall with a dreadful sound.

As if I had turned into a human drill, *BROOOM*, I ended up digging through the concrete and sent flying outside the house—.

In the end, I intruded into the neighboring house’s yard.

Ueh… I’ve pierced it.

The repairing fee of the wall, it’ll be quite high.

It’s sad that my first worry was that instead of my own body.

“Grrr… Woof! Woof! Woof!”

The neighbor’s shiba inu raged against the suspicious person (me), but despite the determination put into its barking, deep inside its eyes a tinge of fear could be seen.

“This condition… Is it normal?…”

Rolling up my t-shirt to see the state of my injuries, my skin had become reddish brown and was constantly swelling and shrinking.

The red-colored cells healed themselves in the blink of an eye, and the broken bones connected back.

A monster tamer able to change its body into that of a monster.

Noelle North Norm.

I superimposed my own body’s condition to that of the monster tamer I fought against a few days ago.

I’ve had an omen from a while back.

My body is little by little drifting away from that of a human.

So, I'm vaguely worried.

The realization that my body's wounds have been automatically healing themselves with the cells of a monster, I got it since after the end of the battle against the Black Tamers the other day.

Do all the ones known as monster tamers hold this kind of monstrous power?

While grateful for this, that to the eye of a passerby seems like a miracle, I felt uneasy before the gradual changes in my body.

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"I-I'm truly sorry!…"

Returning to my room, I frantically apologized to the dumbfounded Kyouko.

Due to suddenly calling her forth, she'll probably be troubled since she has nothing to put on.

Since, enveloped by the bed sheets and with teary eyes as if she was about to cry, Kyouko was quite pitiful, I took a sweatshirt from inside my drawers and put it before her.

Directing my sight to the hole I cleanly made on the wall, I waited like that for Kyouko to change.

"… No. That's fine. Let's both forget what has happened today."

Though it was without ill will, I've witnessed Kyouko's such… Unladylike appearance.

I thought about asking her to reimburse me the wall's repairing fees, but… I gave up.

Having Kyouko grown up in a household that couldn't be said thriving even as flattery is cruelty (being in her undies instead of turning the air conditioner on seems to have been for the sake of saving).

For that reason, it's good we have damage insurance.

It may be an inconvenience for the insurance company, but from now on we'll be under their care for a while.

"Kyouko… Have you finished?"

"… Yup. I'm good."

Turning back, I saw my childhood friend dressed in a big sweater the size of regular nightclothes.

"Sorry for having to borrow it. Tomorrow without fail… I'll wash and return it!"

"…Y-yeah."

What's with this… The sight of a woman in oversized clothes is bewitchingly tempting.

And being familiar with the clothes, the destructive power reinforced with the lewdness was doubled.

"Good grief… How shameless."

While I was transfixed looking at Kyouko, Zonmi, who had rushed to see what was with the sound of the breaking wall, mumbled with her arms crossed before her.

"Let's cut to the chase, Nephilim. What are you doing here?"

"? Why does it matter?"

"It's decided… Each and every time, at every opportunity, you show your u-u-u-underwear to my master!"

"A-are you joking? I-it's not that I like to sho…"

Kyouko started rebutting with her face flushing, but Zonmi wasn't satisfied yet.

"… No. It has not been once or twice, yours exceeds the level of coincidence."

“Even so… Those coincidences keep…”

“… I see. You keep saying you have no wicked intentions? It’s crystal clear you want to snatch away my master. You’re filthy!”

“…!”

“H-hey.”

That was obviously excessive.

True, recently, I feel that I’ve seen Kyouko’s panties with a frequency that makes me want to rebuke “Has someone messed with the random number fix?”… But still, that’s no reason to call her “filthy”.

“… W-what. Rather that would be you…”

Kyouko, who was silently hanging her head in shame, shot her a glare and countered.

"From a while now, it seems you’ve been trying to emphasize ‘my master, my master’, but isn't it now that you aren’t Haru’s only partner?”

“…!”

Zonmi pursed her lips as if thinking about something.

“… You’ve been putting airs of being the only legal wife. Since up till now it seemed you could monopolize Haru… It’s obvious you’re panicking!”

“Whawhawha. I don’t intend that… What’s your basis to say that nonsense!?”

“If you have the time to falsely accuse people of weird things, wouldn’t it be better to convey things with sincerity?”

“… To whom, what do I have to convey?”

“Come on, it’s vexing you that I took Haru’s first summon. You’re just jealous.”

“… Fufufu. Those words, I’ll take them as a war declaration. Come out, Nephilim. In the first place, as a rookie tamer, Chiharu is in no need for two partners.

Who's really the most suited partner for Chiharu? Well, usually…"

When Zonmi was in mid-sentence, the next instant.

"It's terrible, it's terrible, it's terrible! Are you a pervert, pervert oniichan!?"

THUD, the sound of the door being closed with force.

Manami, who had went to a summertime cram school, had arrived.

Wow. It's a godsend.

Since, for good or for bad, this sister of mine has the power to give a whole turn to the mood inside a room.

If these two keep bickering like up till now, she may get hold of the matter of the hole opened in the wall.

Be that as it may.

Now, by all means, it's better that I don't let that comment slide …

"? But I'm not a pervert, am I?"

The moment I voiced the issue, the atmosphere in the room froze.

"…"

"…"

Hey. Why have you become speechless?

How do I put it, how come that, for some reason, Kyouko and Zonmi casted a glance at me when the response from Manami "No, aren't you a pervert?" came. I don't want to hear that coming from you.

“And… Never mind, isn’t it terrible, oniichan!?”

“What’s the matter? You’ve lost your grip.”

“Don’t mind it, read this!”

“Mm. What the heck…?”

From nowhere, Manami produced a single letter.

Eerrrm. The name of the sender was…

“… The heck. I can’t be… Could it be this is a prank of yours?”

Grumping because I didn’t believe her, my sister, puffing her cheeks,

“No way! Look well! Isn’t that mom’s genuine handwriting?”

“… Well, surely.”

If it’s Manami, it’s possible that she has tried once or twice to imitate the handwriting, but I felt that this is too intricate to be just a prank.

“Chiharu’s mother? Now that you mention it, I’ve yet to meet her face to face.”

“… When I think about the day coming that that happens, I get a headache.”

“It can’t be… From Kanae-san!? That woman was still alive…”

“… Could you stop randomly killing off other people’s mothers?”

Even so, there’s a bit of inevitability in her thinking like that.

Kusumi Kanae.

The subject that was risen just now, she’s my mother who flies around the world due to her work.

Her character… The heck, couldn’t it be summed up as a freewheeler?

If one were to say how much of a freewheeler she is, she’s at a level that would make the Mongol nomadic tribes run away barefoot.

To tell the truth, even when we were kids, we had no other way to prove the existence of our mother, except the monthly transfer of our living expenses.

“Then, then, what has she written, oniichan!?”

Manami asked with sparkling eyes.

Despite being more glad than anyone for receiving a letter from mom, and falling on me the right to open the envelope, it seems that, unexpectedly, even my sister has her cute side.

Dear Chiharu & Manami.

Are you all right?

Mom is worried.

Especially for Chiharu, to whom, despite shouldering with the household responsibilities, recently I haven’t done for him any mother-like gestures.

So mom has been thinking.

Please have a blast with all your might from time to time.

I’ve put inside a ticket to a luxury liner cruising tour.

Chiharu, please go with the children you’ve chosen as the most dear to you.

Kanae.

“Yaaaay! A trip with oniichan! It’s a honeymoon for only the two of uuuus!”

Manami entwined herself around my body with the strength of a sea anemone feeding on its prey.

"… No. Look better, Manami. With this A-class ticket, it seems that with one, up to five people can join."

I mentioned what I had realized, peacefully ignoring my sister's eccentric behavior.

Then, the monster girl combo's bodies reacted with a twitch.

"Me too, me too! If it's as you say, I want to go too!"

"… Good grief. There's no way around. Since, as well as to protect my master, it's my duty as your partner."

"Wait a minute, isn't it weird!? Why has the mood become as if everyone is going!? Isn't it properly written? HE•RE, isn't this a ticket that mom has sent so Manami and her brother can be all lovey-dovey as siblings, without interferences?"

"Just where is something like that written!?"

"Ahem. Between the lines, of course!"

"…"

For some reason, Manami made her declaration with a bit of a triumphing face.

… The reason, no one but you gets it.

"But, thinking normally about it, since the ticket covers for five people's share, doesn't mom intend for us all to go together?"

"Isn't it? With this, hasn't mom done it out of concern so that Manami and oniichan can go three times?"

"Let's say we could split it in three times, isn't one person's share on the last trip not covered?…"

“Chicchichi. On the contrary, if oniichan and Manami board the boat joined by the genitals…”

“…”

He-hey.

That may be a prison direct trip tour.

I *AHEM* cleared my throat and started anew,

“Then, as Zonmi, Kyouko, and Manami will come, what do we do about the remaining person?”

“Errrm. Since it’s these members, wouldn’t it be proper that the left over share went to that red dragon kid?”

Against my inquiry, Kyouko calmly reacted.

“It ended up coming to that…”

“? Do you have any objection?”

“… It’s nothing. I didn’t mean it like that.”

Though Iris is certainly a cherished comrade, I can’t picture her coming on a trip with all of us.

For starters, as I know neither where she lives nor what she usually does, would we be able to get along well?

Despite embracing that uneasiness, I didn’t find any good reason to oppose it.

In the end, we entrusted Manami to make an appointment with Iris to do a single rehearsal and, like that, we parted.

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Some days later.

The day we all had decided as suitable, us five, me, Zonmi, Kyouko, Iris, and Manami, turned up at Yokohama's harbor.

… Surprisingly, I feel that up till now we had never gathered these members to go somewhere. At the summer festival, Kyouko didn't come at first.

The feeling of the sea breeze brought by the wind was pleasant.

It would be the best if there was a young lady here clad in a swimsuit, but regrettably, there was no one apart from us, just some old guys with fishing rods who seemed to be looking afar.

"This is weird. Chiharu, is this the correct place?"

"Yeah. According to the map, there's no doubt, but…"

"For now, let's try waiting a bit more. If even then people don't turn up, we better phone to ask."

"So it seems."

Accepting Kyouko's suggestion, we seated on a nearby bench and watched the situation for a bit.

After a few minutes wait.

Like before, no other passengers but us showed up, but instead, a single car parked at the harbor.

I don't know much about cars, but I realized.

That car with a lacquered surface and tinted windows, unless I become a yakuza or a performer, it's a luxury item that there's no way I can afford.

The sliding door opened.

What kind of person could be riding inside?

… Surely, it can be none other but a guy with a V-shaped scar that works in a freelance occupation that starts with 'ya'.

However.

That prediction of mine seemed to be off by large.

The one who showed up from inside was a young… Lady dressed in a maid outfit.

“Chiharu…!? Be careful… That woman…”

“…? An acquaintance?”

As if she was an expert at *cosplay*, it seems she donned the maid uniform with the casualness of a professional.

Her age, around the early twenties?

She was a woman person with glasses that suited her sharp glance and serious demeanor.

Those features were of a breathtaking beauty, but, for good or bad, around me (in the eyes of strangers) there were lots of pretty girls.

I wouldn’t get much of an impact if she were a regular beauty, but—

In her there’s a point that made difference.

That point impossible to miss was her boobs.

… Oops! Darn!

In the heat of the moment, I let out the answer.

So.

Despite her looks, by themselves, were already eye-catching, additionally showily decking out her figure, there were those two big breasts like saying “It’s not enough!”.

~~Hoping~~ Worrying that the buttons on her blouse popped out, my eyes got unintentionally fixed on her glamorous body.

What’s with those breasts… Are they at the level where a hamster could shelter itself from the rain below them?

“”””””…*STARE*——…”””””””

“… Ah!”

This is bad.

It seems the girls around me have gotten wind of my wicked thoughts.

I could come back to my senses thanks to the silent killing intent of the surrounding girls.

“… How shameless. Doing perverted things so early in the morning? How filthy. Has Chiharu’s thinking ability degenerated to the level of a mongrel?”

“E-Errrm. What’s the matter?”

“Heh. So Haru likes women people with big breasts—. That’s the reason—, so that’s why his reactions towards my body were so lukewaaarm—”

“… Hun! Entranced by lumps of meat like those… Thou hast fallen low, monster tamer.”

“Kyouko… Even Iris!?”

…Me, am I thinking too much?

The monster girl trio, each one looking to their own breasts, they are showing somewhat bitter faces.

Now that I mention it, I hadn’t paid much attention until now, but these chicks… They are all very lacking on the bust department.

“Lewd glances are forbidden!!”

“Mogaah!?”

As soon as I heard my sister's voice, everything blackened out.

Wha-what's this?

This thing in front of me… What are these two soft feelings!?

"Oniichan… Why are you ogling other women's breasts? Why?"

"… Yeah?"

"Be reasonable! From the cradle to the grave, oniichan can look only at Manami's boobs!"

"…"

I realized it was my sister who was feeding me this preaching.

Somewhat nostalgic.

Specifically, it tastes like early infancy… Could this warm feeling I can sense through the cloth…!?

It seems my head has been put inside Manami's T-shirt.

"O-Oi. My breath… My breaaaath!? Mogaaaaaaah!?"

Since Manami was hugging me so tightly I couldn't escape to the point of suffocation, caught between her breasts, in the end I ended lacking in oxygen.

Oi oi.

If 'cause of death = suffocation by getting caught between his blood-related little sister's breasts' makes it to the morning news… If it makes it.

I-in that case, wouldn't it be the worst possible development!?

“Kusumi Chiharu-sama… Am I wrong?”

Getting out somehow from inside my sister’s T-shirt, turning my head to look at the maid uniform-wearing glasses young woman, I let out a husky voice.

“Y-Yes. I’m certainly Kusumi Chiharu, but… Have we met somewhere?”

Wait.

Though I’ve replied without thinking, calling out to us with this timing, could it be that this person… Could she be someone from the travel agency that’s hosting the cruising tour?

“Monster Tamer… Dost fall back a bit.”

“Chiharu, please step back a little.”

For some reason, Zonmi & Iris spoke at once with a sharp glance.

Me, Kyouko and Manami, unable to catch up with the current events, couldn’t do but become totally dumbfounded.

“So, what the heck does a demon want with us?”

“… Amazing. Even though I kept to a minimum my release of magic power to the exterior so that you couldn’t realize my true identity in the least. As expected of the scion of the McKenzie bloodline… Do I have to say something like that?”

“What an honor. Having a demon expressly inquiring on my lineage…”

“Wait a minute. I don’t catch what you’re saying, what’s a demon? Is this lady in fact a monster?”

“… No, Chiharu.”

"Monsters and demons are different things. Demon is the generic term to refer to those who rule over the monsters. Either power or influence… In general, they are being incomparably superior to monsters."

"Even I… I've heard this talk from daddy…

Those known as demons are existences alike royalty and nobility on the human world…

The person who bears the most influence from among the demons, called the 'Maou', rules over the entirety of the Netherworld…"

"… I see."

In this world there are two kinds of Maou.

Namely,

The monster tamer king that rules from the shadows of the human world through the IMA—Maou.

Rising above the entirety of the monsters, the king that reigns over the Netherworld—Maou.

It seems that this last one Maou is chosen as the most distinguished from among the demons.

"… Hun! Be it a demon or a monster, it does not matter. From the start, any one who opposes me shall perish by fire… Nothing more."

"… I've ended up being hated simply for being a demon… Be relieved. Since we don't intend to oppose you… Rather, it's the opposite."

"If you want to earn our trust… Start with a valid reason… For what reason have you approached us?"

"Yes. Of course. Later I'll tell you to your hearts' content.

However…"

The young woman dressed in a maid suit made her eyes shine suspiciously.

“Since we are here, let’s head to the Other World.”

The instant after she let out those meaningful words.

SPLAAAAAAAAAAAAASH!

A sheet of spray swelled up from the surface of the sea.

What appeared in front of us, as if splitting the surface, was a giant fish 20 meters long shining in gold.

“Uoh!?”

I don’t understand well what’s happening, but… We must flee…!

Even being a split-second decision, it was already too late.

When I realized it, *GULP*, we had been swallowed by the giant fish.

Is this… For real…

Despite us having been invited to a luxury liner cruising tour… Why have we been eaten by a giant fish?

Certainly, this fish… With its golden scales, it feels a bit more gorgeous than your regular fish…

Even so, it’s strange.

It’s true that it was a surprise attack but, couldn’t this attack from the enemy have been avoided?

It may be me thinking over things too much, it seemed like Zonmi and Iris took the attack without even trying to ward it off.

… But, my thinking ability's working can't keep any longer.

It may be that my mind has suffered a short-circuit due to the sudden flow of the events.

Swallowed by a mysterious giant fish, I lost consciousness.

Chapter 2 - Welcome to the Netherworld!

I opened my eyes, before me was a plain of sea… And so we return to the present.

I tried asking Iris about the situation.

It seems that, once we were swallowed by the mysterious giant fish, we were transported all the way to the Netherworld through a side Abyss Gate that exists under the sea.

… No, If I'm dreaming I want to wake up.

They say that the different Abyss Gates that exist on land, sea and sky have each one their own control post from the IMA to strictly manage them.

Though I'd like to think that all of this was a joke… It seems that the giant fish that swallowed us is a major means of transport in the Netherworld to cross the underwater Abyss Gate.

From the start, it seems that this was the reason why Iris & Zonmi, having lived in the Netherworld for a long time, didn't evade the attack of the giant fish.

But then… I still don't have the feeling of "I came to the Netherworld". It's not that my personal image of the netherworld includes things like the "Mountain of Nails" or the "Sea of Blood". Right now, if we take out part of the scenery, it doesn't seem to be so different from the human world.

"Then… Where are Zonmi and the rest?"

If my memory serves right… I think both Zonmi and Kyouko were also swallowed by the fish.

Though I could call back Zonmi & Kyouko by summoning if I felt like it… It would be a pain if I left Manami out.

As I tried asking, feeling uneasy, Iris quietly snorted,

"… Thy worries are not required. If it's those lasses, they are yonder, scrutinizing what bathing suit they shall change into."

"… Is that so? If everyone is safe, that's fine."

That was close.

Had I summoned Zonmi and the rest while they were changing into their swimsuits… I could easily guess what follows.

"About bathing suits… Even though it's the same what to change into… It seems they largely wanted to cater to thy affections."

Mumbling unintelligibly, Iris added something.

Where Iris was looking at, there was a shed that seemed to be a beach hut.

… Guessing from her way of talking, do they run a swimsuit rental service in that hut?

"For saying that any one was fine, it seems you've chosen a cheekily cute swimsuit."

"Nu…? Nunu!?"

As I jokingly told that, Iris reacted in a panicked fashion.

"T-thou…!! W-what hallucinations dost thou speak of!?

My choosing of this bathing suit… T-this one was simply the first I put my eyes unto… It certainly has no other meaning…"

"… N-no. I understand. Since I understand. Don't glare at me like that…"

I wonder why she denied it so vehemently.

Iris is, after all, a girl of that age (?).

Taking her time choosing her swimsuit… It's nothing weird.

Rather, I think that would have been the normal thing…

"… Chiharu. Have you finally woken up?"

Along with the sound of the waves came a dignified *alto* voice.

“Uoh!?”

I unintentionally let out a high pitch cry.

Turning my head, Zonmi, clad in a swimsuit, was standing next to me.

“O-oniichan. You woke up—♪”

“…’d grief. Till when would you keep sleeping.”

One after another, Kyouko (in a swimsuit) & Manami (in a swimsuit) also rushed to my side.

By the way, while we are at it, I’ll explain what kinds of swimsuits each of them are wearing—

Zonmi and Kyouko are wearing, respectively, a white bikini and a black one.

Zonmi’s swimsuit comes with a classy pareo, the neat feeling fits to a T with Zonmi’s honor student personality.

Kyouko’s swimsuit is a string bikini with the cloth area reduced to the extreme, signs of the effort to release a bit of sexiness while concealing the body handicaps (like the bust size) can be seen.

About Manami, though it reaches the level of, if possible, no comments… It was a shell bikini made from three shells, on the smallish side (Japanese scallop?), that cover the breast and the nether regions. Deplorable.

“Uffu~n♪ How’s it—? Having taken the trouble of coming to the Netherworld, Manami has turned into a mermaid monster. Graah!! Graah, graah!!”

“…”

Manami mimicked sound was absolutely unlike any one a mermaid would make.

The usual me would have made a retort in disgust, but… The current me didn't have the composure.

"… Chiharu? Could it be that you are feeling unwell? In that case… You better rest under that tree's shadow…"

"…"

"Haru? What's the matter? Maybe coming to the Underworld has been such a shock—"

"I-it's not like that, Kyouko-oneechan!? Look again!"

Manami opened her eyes round as if seeing an extremely astounding scene.

"Could it be… It may be the first time seeing this even for Manami… O-oniichan, are you crying for reals!?"

""… What?""

For an instant, Zonmi & Kyouko were left with their mouths agape and a face of not knowing what's what, but as soon as they realized I was, in fact, crying, their countenances clouded.

So.

As soon as I saw these chicks in swimsuits, recalling a trauma of mine, of all things, I started shedding manly tears.

"Say, girls… Could you keep quiet and listen to my story?"

Since, unusual of me, I started to speak in a serious mood, the four girls nodded in silence and waited for my words.

"That… Happened last summer.

Since the holidays were coming to an end with nothing happening, it was intolerable. With Youhei… We both went to the beach on the last day of summer.

On paper, the plan was to pick up girls.

However, let's think calmly about it.

When two dull male high school students whose history without girlfriend = their age, will they succeed in picking up girls?

No, even if they accept the challenge and without fail they suffer honorable defeat, I think that's still one more page on the bitter memories of youth.

However, you know… What sadly happened was that we weren't able to call out to a single girl. Without courage, we couldn't even set foot on the match stage.

And so, you know? I made a promise with Youhei.

'Next summer, surrounded by girls in swimsuits, we'll live a rose-colored youth', we promised.

Youhei… My… Our dream, I realized it.

How I wish you too… Could see this scenery."

‘‘‘‘‘‘‘‘…’’’’’’’’

How was it, this trauma of mine deeper than the Mariana trench I've presented to you?

Being considerate with the seriousness of the mood (?) all of the girls remained silent.

… Nevertheless, that's only natural.

Though I've come into contact once or twice with the girls' pasts, this is the first time I talk about mine of my own volition with my own words.

"Hehe! My bad… Getting all melancholic over such a thing… Forget what I just said."

Like that, putting an end to it with what I reckon are the coolest words, I suddenly noticed.

Looking at them, contrary to my expectations—.

"… Erm, excuse me. I don't know how do I have to react before such an unfunny story told with a serious face…"

"… How do I put it, where was the emotive part in the story just now?"

"Oniichan, learn to read the mood…"

"What a folly, monster tamer…"

"Uh… wha…"

I've been told as they liked.

GRRR These wenches don't understand.

The feelings of two male highschoolers who went to the beach trying to pick up girls, didn't have to courage to call up to them and ended up with no other choice but to spend the time picking up jellyfish that were washed ashore inside a vinyl bag (true story).

"Well… Saying it with simple words, your swimsuits are excessively cute and the best. These are tears of joy."

"…"

This is bad. Could it be I've dug my grave deeper?

The girls have once again become silent and have hung their heads down.

So it seems.

I may have talked without mincing words a little too much.

"… Moron. If it's like that, don't start talking nonsense…"

With her cheeks very red , the words of the sighing Kyouko cruelly resounded in my ears.

"I see. Exactly as rumored, a true ladykiller."

"!?"

The one who suddenly intruded in our conversation was none other than the one responsible of having brought us to the Netherworld just a while ago.

The young woman in maid clothes.

However, different from before, she had changed into a racing swimsuit.

… How weird.

Speaking of racing swimsuits with their low exposure, despite, if pushed, I'd say they give a plain image, worn by this person it's charmingly sexy.

As I expected, is it because of her breasts? Is it due to her breasts?

"Excuse my late introduction. My name is Lilith.

I'm the succubus Lilith Artemisia.

Chiharu-sama. Firstly let me beg for forgiveness for my rudeness from a while ago. Excuse me."

Why is it.

Certainly, it's obvious that you should speak humbly when asking for forgiveness, but…

Is this what's known as 'businesslike'? In any case, I don't think that her words are only a front.

“Chiharu. You don’t need to be so vigilant. It seems that that was her nature from the start.”

“… Is she trustworthy?”

“That… I also don’t know. However, at least it seems she hasn’t brought harm to us.”

“… Understood.”

I don’t know what has happened, but it seems that while I was out they discussed something.

“Well, then, as originally agreed, I’ll borrow Chiharu-sama. Since I think it will take a while, you can go ahead and enjoy the beach for an hour.”

“Comprehended. Take care of that master of mine… No, of ours, I sincerely beg you.”

“…”

Somehow, now it seems I have to try asking Lilith-san about the circumstances.

With this and that, I—.

Guided by Lilith-san, my feet brought me to the cabin that Zonmi and the girls seemingly used to change clothes.

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The beach house (?) Lilith-san brought me to, as it displays a great variety of swimsuits, it seems that, as I thought, runs a swimsuit rental service.

Other than swimsuits, as it has facilities like lockers or shower rooms, here too, the standard structure doesn’t seem to be very different to a beach house from the human world.

The only thing that feels different, perhaps that there’s absolutely no one inside the cottage?

It’s only natural that I worry about that, but this shop’s management, how do they organize this?

Harboring this doubt, I entered the cabin alone with Lilith-san.

“What’s the matter? Could you please stop doing nothing but looking at my breasts? Want me to kill you?"

“… Wha-what?”

Totally puzzled, what I received was a merciless threat that put a stop to my thoughts from the girl over there.

“Could it be, do you think I didn’t notice?

Men are really the lowest. With the excuse that that’s part of my work, they ogle my breasts as if licking all over them…”

“…”

Eh… Wha…

What the heck?

This girl… The moment we were alone, it seems her mood has so questionably changed into this.

“Aah, I forgot saying that I’m bad with all male♂ beings… Rather, they are what I hate most in the world. For that reason, when talking to a man, I end up behaving somewhat rude. Excuse me.”

“…”

I see.

I see.

So that’s the reason the mood changed so suddenly.

But a man-hating succubus is a weird tale.

Be that as it may, males♂ are the thing she hates most in the world… Does that make half the living beings on earth the thing she hates most in the world?

It seems I no longer understand what ‘the thing’ means .

“Then… Though I have many things that I want to ask you, why have you brought us to the Netherworld?”

Cutting off our conversation, I promptly started asking questions.

“That’s a justified doubt. However, in order to answer that question, there are several things we must talk about before.”

“… Understood.”

“Firstly, Chiharu-sama. Do you have any knowledge about what your mother herself usually does for a living?”

“Haah… If it’s my mom, she works for a trading company and is currently overseas on a temporary job transfer.”

“How dumb. Even though Manami-sama had long since realized it, by the point she arrived here…”

“…?”

What the heck?

Surely, I do realize that I’ve been called dumb a lot by people, but what bugs me is how could I lose to Manami.

“Kanae-sama’s job is, like yours, monster tamer.”

“… Wha!?”

Before such an unexpected declaration, I cried in disarray.

“Eerrrm. Do you have any proof? How can I believe you if you tell me that so suddenly?”

“… A proof?”

Lilith-san once again made the lenses of her glasses flash,

“How come you haven’t noticed yourself?

You siblings agility is obviously not that of an ordinary human… Becoming a monster tamer is but obvious. That constitution of yours has been inherited from a special monster tamer that is called a living legend—Kanae-sama."

“…”

Surely, now that she says it, there have been several clues.

An ordinary human, unlike me, wouldn’t have the special ability of being able to bite off handcuff chains (and that’s why I try to not use it outside home as much as possible), and even Manami somehow bears the battle prowess to fight on equal footing against Zonmi.

If she says that us siblings’ abnormalities are inherited from our mother, those doubts are cleared.

“… So, does that mean our father too is someone related to the monster tamers?”

Our father, Kamiigusa Yuuto-san, divorced mom before I was old enough to understand what was going on.

Mom once showed me a photo; he was a guy that looked like a gentle-mannered refreshing handsome man.

Why do my looks not resemble those of that person… Even now I can’t help but curse my fate…

“No. According to the information taken from the central database of the IMA… Manami-sama’s father was an extremely ordinary normal man. I’d dare say, he doesn’t know of the existence of monster tamers.”

“… Is that so?”

That’s to say, mom married dad while keeping her own job a secret.

Once, when I asked mom about the reason of the divorce, I remember her giving me a worthless answer like “Errm. Because I felt he wasn’t the right one?”

Nevertheless, thinking back, the reason of the divorce may have been her being unable to properly reach a compromise between her married life and her work.

Hey, wait.

“… Just now, have you said ‘Manami-sama’s father’?”

As I pointed it out, Lilith-san’s temple twitched.

“I see. You are surprisingly perceptive. I’d say, it is as you suspect, Chiharu-sama.”

With that preface, Lilith-san bluntly made a shocking declaration.

“Chiharu-sama and Manami-sama are half-siblings with the same mother, but each one has their own father.”

“…”

Holy cow!

It's a fact so astonishing that left me with my mouth open, unable to close it.

Until just now, I believed that Yuuto-san, who I have only seen in photos, was my father, but…

Strangely, I didn’t feel like doubting Lilith-san words.

Why is it like that?

To tell the truth, I’ve been holding doubts for a long time.

Since my and Manami’s faces don’t resemble each other, and our personalities and tendencies are different.

I wondered if Manami and I were really blood-related siblings…

"… That is to say, who is my true father? Do you know, Lilith-san?"

"Yeah. Of course I know. However, rather than with words, it will be faster to do a body experiment.

Chiharu-sama, could you close your eyes for a bit?"

"… Understood."

I closed my eyes as I've been told.

"Then, excuse me."

"Guah!?"

When I opened my eyes due to the pain, I had a deep cut in my nape.

"Eerrm. Why the heck have you done this?"

"… Just look, please."

Uu. Once again…

I'd say she has injured some blood vessel.

Were I a regular human, I'd have need to stop the bleeding and call an ambulance… But in my case, the tale was different.

Shortly after being injured, the wound that spurted large quantities of blood was healed by the monster tamer cells.

To tell the truth, it's the first time I've shown it to another person.

Since I don't feel good about being seen and I don't want to worry anyone without motive.

"… I see. The flesh has completely healed in less than ten seconds? Geez, what amazing recovery power."

"Erm… What relation does my regenerative capability have to do with my father?"

"You still haven't understood?"

Raising her glasses, Lilith-san, for who knows what time today, said some astonishing words.

"Your father is not human. Your father is a monster… No, properly speaking, he's a demon, the existence that is you is a chimera born between a devil and a human, never seen before in history."

"…… What?"

I am a chimera born between a demon and a human?

Without time to digest the information before me, Lilith-san resumed speaking as if forced to answer.

"Usually, for the children born from the breeding of different races, the blood of one of them takes precedence and the birth race gets decided at random.

Were it not like that, when monsters from different races interbred, each time a new race would be born.

However, there are some exceptions.

in the Netherworld, until now, some tens or hundreds of chimeras have been born, and those times a new race has come to be. As an example, haven't Nephilim been born from between fallen angels and giants?"

"Erm… In other words…"

“Putting it into easy-to-understand words—the existence known as you is an existence unique in the world, a new race of monster born between a demon and a human.”

“…”

Astonishing.

No, though I know Lilith’s words have astonished me each time all day long, this time is clearly at another level.

Lilith-san's words had power, enough to make the view of life I’ve fostered until now sway.

“Then, with all that said, why don’t we return to the original question?

The reason why you have been brought to the Netherworld—that’s because it’s essential for your decision on how to live from now on.

That is, will Chiharu-sama keep living like until now as a human?

Will you live as a monster?

Or, if you wish, you may have the possibility to live as a demon… Don’t rush it, you have plenty of time.

While you sightsee the Netherworld, think slowly about it.

That’s, above all, what your mother—Kanae-sama wishes for."

“…”

My true identity is not that of a human but a new race of monster.

Thus, I’m confused by how calmly I can accept this surprising fact.

… No, it may be that, deep in my heart, I feel relieved.

How can that be? Living until now not knowing what kind of person I am myself, I lived an aimless life.

Ever since I was a kid, I was faintly aware I was a bit different from your regular human, but… Although, if I were to probe into it, I felt I'd step onto a dangerous landmine—.

Against the doubt before me, I simply turned a blind eye.

However, right now.

At last, I could get some knowledge about who am I.

That is, the fact that I'm not a genuine human has given me a bit of a shock.

However, luckily, I… Meeting Zonmi and the girls, I knew that, be they monster or human, essentially they are living beings all the same.

For that reason, maybe that has kept the mental shock to a minimum.

Really… I can't match up to those girls.

"… By the way, are Zonmi and the rest aware?"

"Yeah. While you were sleeping, I conveyed to them all that had to be conveyed."

"Is that so…?"

Inside me, a single emotion.

An anxiety I can't wash off has started to bud.

That is… If, once they know about me actually being a strange chimera between human and demon, can they keep being as they are.

Once they know about my upbringing, will they keep being at my side as they were till now?

If, for argument's sake—.

Were they to reject me, I don't believe I could keep my peace of mind.

"As I thought, are you anxious? Will others accept the current you…"

"…"

“In that case, your worries are unnecessary. Since, at least, those girls right there have already accepted you.”

As Lilith-san said that with a tone full of hidden meaning, a noise like wood creaking was heard.

Looking at the back door of the cabin, where the sound had come from, *THUD!*, there were four girls falling down like an avalanche.

“Chi-Chiharu!? This is not what it seems! I was just keeping watch on your sister, who was eavesdropping on your conversation, so that she didn’t go wild…”

“Uu. I told you not to push…”

"… Heavy."

The monster girl trio of Zonmi, Kyouko and Iris, in swimsuits, were bunched up together sprawled on the floor.

Among them, it seems only the shrewd Manami sensed the danger and avoided the accident…

Superhuman reflexes that best those of monsters.

I see. Is this the blood of mom, who's known as the legendary monster tamer…

"You girls… How long have you been there?"

"Since around when oniichan was fascinated by that woman's breasts and made me mad."

"Isn't that very much from the start!?"

"Before that, Chiharu… Is that about doing nothing but staring at that succubus's breasts since a while ago the truth?"

"…"

"Why are you averting your gaze?"

"W-well, it may be that per chance they may have entered my field of view… Mostly, I can't deny it… Ahaha."

"… Is that so?"

This is bad.

This pattern is *that one*. The pattern where I get totally beaten up.

Even if I can recover thanks to the power of a demon, unlike ghouls, my sense of pain works normally.

What I mean is: painful things are painful.

Cloaked in an unspeakable air of intimidation, Zonmi approached me.

I closed my eyes with resignation.

A moment later, I felt something soft touching my left arm.

“In that case, as punishment, for all day today you must play with me.”

Opening my eyes, Zonmi was linking arms with me in a way so that her breasts were pressing against my left arm.

Eh. Isn’t she being awfully nice today?

Usually right now, she’d be hitting the lights out of me with her monster strength at full throttle.

… Thinking carefully, the flow of the conversation has been unnatural. I don’t understand what that “in that case” stands for.

“S-sly! If we go with that, then I’ll join too!”

Burning with competitive spirit against Zonmi, following that, Kyouko pressed her own breasts against my right arm.

“This zombie! She has the nerve to seduce oniichan right in front of Manami!”

Breaking into a run and yelling “Hop!”, Manami demonstrated a high jump reaching about 3 meters high.

“Guoh!?”

Being her landing point seemingly my head, the strong impact made me lose balance.

But, as Zonmi & Kyouko were supporting my body from both arms, it was only a close call and she managed without a hitch.

In the end, I got into a situation where, while linking arms with Zonmi & Kyouko, I was giving a shoulder ride to my sister for an unknown reason.

Errr.

The shell is sticking to the back of my head and it prickles…

"… Good grief, what a farce."

What Iris has just said is harsh beyond reasonable.

If having one girl on each side is called 'a flower in each hand', I wonder what's the term for my current situation.

Eeeerm… Full-body flowerbed?

"… Chiharu-sama truly has nice companions."

Hearing Lilith-san speak formally like that, I suddenly noticed.

The anxiety of 'will those around me accept me as a monster?' I was feeling a while ago has vanished without a trace.

I got an out of place feeling on Zonmi's words from just before.

By any chance… Could it be that this great increase in skin ship… Is their way of comforting me?

Thinking like that, my heart was filled with warmth and I felt like a dazzling unknown emotion overflowed inside me.

I want… This precious feeling unlike any other, to protect it forever, ever.

"Gotcha, let's have a blast all day long!"

Demon: Succubus **LV**: 17

Physical strength: C
Power: C
Speed: A

Lovely female monster.

Seduces boys with its bewitching body.

It's sexual desire surpasses even that of a horse.

Serial number: ???

Chapter 3 - Lineage of the Maou

We, having had a blast at the beach until it got dark, driven by Lilith-san, went by car to the lodging hotel.

“Erm… There’s something that has been bugging me for a while.”

“Yes, what is it?”

“Aren’t there any other monsters around here? Even in the beach there were no other visitors besides us…”

“Yeah. This place is a demesne of us demons. No one has been entertained here apart from you.”

“…? But, a while ago, I think I saw some monsters in the sky that resembled birds…”

“I beg your pardon. It seems I’ve expressed myself wrong. Properly speaking, I meant there were no intelligent monsters… Monsters able to adopt human form. We differentiate unintelligent monsters by calling them magical beasts."

“I see.”

As if our conversation had made her remember something, Zonmi, who was seating at the nearside, turned back.

“… Since we are at it, there’s something I should explain to the little sister. The difference between zombies and ghouls lies in what the succubus has just mentioned.

Though, properly speaking, there are no less of a thousand differences between both races from the historical standpoint… Explaining it with easy to understand words, it comes to ghouls=intelligent zombies.”

“Wow. Is that so?”

To tell the truth, I also hadn’t heard about the difference between ghouls and zombies.

I see.

To Zonmi, mistaking ghouls with zombies is the same as to a human being treated as an animal.

That is, that's the reason Zonmi gets mad.

"Manami… chan, have you listened?"

Despite being the chance to better the way Manami calls Zonmi…

"… ZZZ"

"Wha, she's sleeping!"

I'd say, that's because she was frolicking at the sea.

The youngest group of Manami & Iris were soundly sleeping, cuddling each other in the back seat.

"… There's no way. Let's explain it to the little sister on another occasion."

Seeing Manami peacefully sleeping, Zonmi gave up.

Returning to her original position, Zonmi sat once again on the nearside.

"It's a pity for those sleeping but… People. We'll arrive soon."

"Could it be… Is that the hotel we'll be staying at…"

"Of course, it surely is."

"… Haha. This is great."

What appeared in our sights from beyond the window was a fairytale-like scenery you wouldn't usually see in the human world.

The building in front of us… Rather than an hotel, it would be better called a castle.

It had a classy air that made it seem directly taken off from the Middle Ages Europe.

“Well… Let’s get down. From here on, we’ll go on foot.”

After waking up Manami and Iris, we got down as Lilith-san had said.

The gardens of the hotel were so spacious that it seemed like you could use them to play golf like that.

Furthermore, they not only were spacious, it looked like time and money had been spent in every nook, like the carefully planted and arranged trees or the uniquely shaped fountain.

Like that, it seems you could kill enough time simply by observing the scenery.

Standing before the hotel (castle?), we opened the huge door with a dull sound.

“““““““Welcome home, masters!”””””””

Next instant.

There was a battalion of more than ten maids to greet us.

Moreover… Each one of them was, to some extent, a beauty (though “to some extent” right here comes by rating them with “compared with the girls around me, they are a bit lacking”, in truth they are striking beauties).

“They are like me, lesser demons, succubi. As you see, they’ve been gathered by their looks. If something troubles you, feel free to command them as you like. After all, we have personnel to spare.”

“… Now, have you said as we like?”

The instant I asked, I felt stares overflowing with killing intent coming from the girls around me.

“… Of course sexual requests are forbidden?”

“I-it’s not like I was asking with that purpose!?”

"… Why have you suddenly started talking like a tsundere?"

Kyouko rebutted me with a cold stare.

Is it you saying that?

"Quite right… I always tell them to give maximum priority to attend to the guests. So… If that's what Chiharu-sama really wishes, they may not be able to really refuse."

"Hoho!"

My cheeks softened unconsciously with the answer brimming with romance as if in the dreams of any man.

"Oniichan… Do you know what will happen if you do something like that?"

"Chiharu… Are you aware of what will happen to you if you do something like that?"

"Haru… You know what'll happen if you do that?"

"Yeah! I know! Since I know, please don't tell me the same sentence the three of you…"

How regretful.

As I'm under close surveillance by this lot, it seems that I can't ask *KYAKKYA UFUFU* things from the maids.

So, putting an end to those delusions, I felt somewhat anxious.

"… Do you feel unwell, Iris?"

Ever since entering the hotel, Iris has been behaving suspiciously, walking as if she were hiding behind us.

Pale as a sheet, Iris' every movement felt as if it was lacking her usual brazen demeanor.

"… There's no issue. Just a little fatigued."

“Is that so? If you say so…”

What the heck?

This uncomfortable feeling I can’t get rid of—.

Is Iris really just tired?

Looking carefully, her petrified stance, as if hiding behind us, can be perceived as her being scared of something.

“… It’s all right. There’s no one here that’ll bring you harm.”

It took me a while to notice that Lilith-san’s words were meant for Iris.

With what intention has she said that?

Without finding a satisfactory response to what it was that she had seen, thinking in her own way—.

In the end, we were led like that inside the hotel.

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After that.

As we had free time until the start of dinner, each one went their own way.

Like that, being told by Lilith-san “I have something I want to show you”, I went to the hotel’s basement.

In spite of the above ground facilities being a gathering of the newest things that are not inferior to those of the human world, the basement was worn out like a dungeon from an RPG, it created a sharp contrast.

“… It’s a considerably dusty place.”

“Yeah. Since this hotel has been reformed from a Maou castle that was used up to two hundred years ago.”

“… So it was like that?”

Is that the reason the exterior of the hotel is so castle-like?

“But then… This underground tunnel is the only thing that’s kept intact in the same state as back then.”

“Why haven’t you refurbished it?”

“As this basement stores many things like rare valuable expensive antiques and magic artifacts… So as to guard them, a lot of life-threatening harmful traps have been installed. That’s why… Not even us can carelessly remodel it.”

“Erm… I’d have liked that you had told me in advance about that important thing of ‘life-threatening’…”

Fearing harm, after that, I walked carefully down the stairs.

Hey… What the heck?

While I was walking, I realized one thing.

That was that Lilith-san, who walked before me, was maintaining at all times a distance of just over a meter from me.

If I walked faster, she also walked faster, If I walked slower, she also walked slower.

Since that gait wasn't something she had become accustomed to for nothing, I unconsciously became impressed.

"Just Lilith."

While we were going down the stairs, Lilith-san softly muttered as if remembering something.

"… Eh?"

"I think I should have said it to you before, but… Just call me Lilith, please, no honorifics. If I tell you my true feelings, serving a man… Though it's more humiliating than being ravished by cattle… Since, in the end, it's a job requested by my benefactor Kanae-sama…"

"… Is that so?"

I feel that, if only a bit, I've learned a part of her background.

Despite being a total man-hater, for the reason "since it's my job", she's forced to adopt a subservient attitude towards a man.

This is nothing other than my personal guessing, but that may be the reason why, until now, she has behaved so awkwardly.

"Lilith."

"… Uh."

“Lilith!”

“… Guh!”

“Lilith?”

“… Ng.”

“…”

Why is it?

Despite having said it’s humiliating, each time I call to her I think she puts on a pleasure-filled face.

Could it be that this person… She has in fact a fetish?

“Erm… If you dislike it, why don’t I stop calling you without honorifics for no reason…?”

“…”

Once I suggested that, Lilith-san dropped her shoulders as if she was a little dejected.

“I see. Chiharu-sama, you have quite a brute hobby. Knowing I cannot refuse… You dare to restrict my options…”

“Of course I don’t plan to do that. I mean… Are you all right?”

“What the heck do you mean by that? Of course I’m not all right. I feel as disgraced as if you had forced me to clean a public toilet’s urinal with my tongue.”

“… No, I didn’t ask with that meaning. It seems you’re having a nosebleed?”

“… Wha.”

Right after I pointed that out.

Lilith-san’s face turned beet red and she got flustered.

“Th-th-this… It’s not what it seems! It’s not like… I was having dirty thoughts or anything. Turning humiliations received from men into pleasure… It’s decidedly not that!?”

“… Hah, is that so?”

In the first place, getting a nosebleed by having dirty thoughts is a trope from manga and anime without any scientific basic, but… Judging by this girl’s reaction, there’s no doubt.

“Here. A hankie.”

“… Th-there’s no need. I have mine.”

Saying that, Lilith-san turned back and started briskly walking by herself.

Mmm. Lilith-san may say that, but I feel that it's still a bit too early to leave honorifics out.

While thinking that, I once again went down the stairs, chasing after her.

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"Well. We have arrived. Our destination lies at the other side of that door."

Have we been walking for around 20 minutes after that?

Pointing at the wall in front of her, Lilith-san said those words.

"What door… No matter how you look at it, that wall before us looks like a dead end."

"Is that so… To the eyes of an outsider it may seem like nothing more than a wall… But if I press here…"

After Lilith-san pressed a part of the brick wall, in the next instant.

With the sound of something being pulled, the wall before me opened right and left.

"I see. A hidden door?"

This is looking more and more like a typical RPG.

Still wary of the traps, I walked through the hidden door.

And, what came into my sight—.

"Is this it? The thing you said you wanted to show me…"

It wasn't like after the hidden door there was a treasure in gold and silver.

It wasn't like there was a huge monster.

What laid there was a regular small room.

No, to be accurate, it doesn't seem to be any different from the human world.

For having expressly come walking till here, I'd say it lacks impact… What a let-down.

"Yeah. This could be considered to be the den of the former Maou."

"!?"

Just as I heard Lilith-san words, I felt my back growing stiff in an instant.

The king who rules over the Netherworld—the Maou.

Even though up until now I've regarded that existence as something as distant as the weather in foreign countries, recently I feel that the frequency with which I'm hearing that word has increased all at once.

"… Why is such a thing here?"

"… The reason is as I explained a moment ago.

This hotel was originally reformed from the castle of the Maou. For said reason, it's nary a wonder even if something remained.

"Surely… That's possible…"

At least, I'd like it if you explained that to me beforehand.

I'd say it's bad for my heart or something. I wish you'd put yourself in my shoes when you are suddenly told "this is the Maou's room".

"… What's drawn in that picture is the countenance of the former Maou.

The 34th Maou—Cruel. There are no words to describe the greatness of his achievements. Being a fanatic of the human world's… especially Japan's culture, he brought many technologies to the Netherworld and brought forth an engineering revolution."

"…"

I see.

So the fact the scenery at the Netherworld didn't differ much from that of the human world is due to this Cruel guy.

"… He's more ordinary than I expected."

That was what I honestly felt when I saw the man in the picture.

If we talk about the personal image I have of a Maou, though I picture him as a character with a more sinister and wicked face, the one in the picture, the pair of horns growing from his head aside, looks like a regular old man you could find anywhere (?).

"Surely… You cannot say his looks are good even as flattery.

However, there's one legend about Cruel… I heard he was popular with the ladies at such a level that it looked like a love potion was emitted from his body ."

"… You joking?"

I'm not so gullible.

That this… Old man like the ones you can find anywhere is a popular guy on legendary levels, how can it be.

"Incredible… That's the kind of face you have right now.

By the way, it's recorded that the Maou Cruel, in the 300 years he ruled over the Netherworld, has in fact married 14 wives and left more than 20 heirs."

"Fourt…"

Is this old man for real?

Grrrr. Harem man… Unforgivable.

"Even so… Being popular with the ladies has its merits and its demerits.

It's said Cruel made only a single mistake in his whole life… And that was all of the women troubles he brought on himself and did nothing about.

Was it about twenty years now? This constitution that granted him excessive popularity with the Netherworld ladies was a curse, Cruel tragically met death under the cover of the night at the hands of a single woman moved out of jealousy.”

“…A-are you serious?”

I take back my words.

Isn’t it the best to have everything in moderation?

You can even die from being too popular with the girls… I don’t think that way out of envy.

“Then, since Cruel has died, what kind of person has become the next Maou?”

As I went and asked, Lilith-san put on a meek face and gently shook her head,

“Unfortunately… That still hasn’t been decided.”

“… Eh?”

“It’s as I told you just a while ago. I told you the sole mistake Cruel made in his life was his women troubles that left him with too many heirs.

After Cruel’s death… A bloody war unfolded between his more than twenty heirs to see who held the title of next Maou.

Especially, the dispute between those who oppose the changes in the Netherworld and the supporters of the constant peace up until now increase day by day in violence.

It’s not an easy thing to say, but the origin of the monster incidents that happened at the human world in recent years… Have as one of their causes the political disturbances brought by this turmoil."

“…”

I didn’t know.

That the passing of the former Maou held influence to such an extent.

If I think about it… Until now I didn't know a thing.

About the Netherworld. About my family.

And, above all… About myself.

"Thank you very much. I feel that I understand the reason why Lilith-san has brought me here a bit."

"… I'm not worthy of those words. Then, do we return above ground?"

"Eeerm… Before that, there's something I'd want to ask… This, what's this sword stabbed into the floor?"

"!?"

Just when I tried to pick up that sword.

"Y-you can't!"

Lilith-san yelled, her face devoid of blood.

"That sword… It's a treasure sword called 'Shiden' that, inheriting the Cruel's will, rejects everyone except those with the makings of a true Maou.

That sword does still keep some of Cruel's magic power and if a normal person touches it, it will be the last thing they do! Blue lightning will eat into their minds and their whole body will get turned into ashes!"

"… Eh, you're totally joking, right? Since, look, the normal me is touching it and there doesn't seem to be any problem."

"…… Wha?"

For a while.

Lilith-san looked like she blinked in surprise with her mouth half-open, but in the end she came back to her senses and *AHEM* she cleared her throat.

“Of course everything I said was a joke.”

“It is, isn’t it. You got me.”

“However, Chiharu-sama. Even if it’s like that, it’s not nice of you to go touching the things in the room without my consent.”

“Sorry. It was such a cool sword…”

It appealed to the chuuni in the depths of my heart.

“I’ll let it slide just this time, but be careful.

As I’ve just told you, inside this underground there are lots of traps that we still haven’t managed to comprehend. If you carelessly touch something in the room, you could activate some switch…”

“Erm… Lilith-san. Do you… Hear a weird noise?”

“? A weird noise, you say?”

“Like turning cogwheels… A somewhat ominous sound.”

“I beg your pardon. I cannot hear such a sound.”

“… Is that so?”

That’s weird.

I certainly can hear it crystal clear.

Possibilities I can think of… There are two.

One is that I’m just mishearing… The other one is that the me that has awakened the power of a monster has a hearing ability that surpasses Lilith-san’s.

… It seems the latter is the correct one.

As I was pondering about that, the cogwheel noise became gradually stronger and, in the end, I could feel the ground shake under my feet.

"… Above! Lilith-san!"

How careless.

The cause is not yet definite, but… Me having picked the sword may have been what has activated the trap.

In an instant.

The ceiling split in two and a huge iron ball fell from above Lilith-san's head.

This is bad. The iron ball that's coming from right above Lilith-san seems to entirely fall into her blind spot.

Come to this… I can only save her!

"Excuse me!"

Ready to die, I jumped at Lilith-san.

… Safe.

It seems I managed to avoid the ball by a hair's breadth.

However.

It seems that due to diverting my attention only upwards, I left my feet defenseless.

On the floor where just a while ago there was nothing, there appeared numerous pitfalls like in a Swiss cheese.

"… Ku. Double trap?"

I tried to assess it calmly, but it was too late already.

At our wits' end, we fell through a hole.

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The pitfalls that suddenly appeared inside the room were deeper than I thought.

I'd say… I think we have fallen 20 meters down?

To a regular human it'd have been instant death… Perhaps I should say it wouldn't have been weird if a tragedy where the body was scattered in pieces had happened… That's a non-human quality.

… When I say it myself, I feel a bit sad.

Though I've broken several bones, as they'll be as good as new with just a little of spit, it's not really an issue.

"Are you hurt somewhere?"

"…"

"Erm… Lilith-san! Say something!"

"…"

No response.

At first glance, she doesn't seem to have external injuries, but… It may be that she has hit her head somewhere.

In that case… That's bad.

Though it seems she's breathing, I have to call for help asap…

"… Do-don't touch me."

Interrupting my thoughts, I could hear a frail voice I wouldn't have expected from her usual self.

"Good… You're safe."

"Don't… Touch me. Please… Go away."

"U-understood."

Since Lilith-san asked me with quite a serious tone, I unconsciously became panicked.

Although, in the first place, the cause that activated the trap was me… I'll give my life to protect her.

That way of speaking… Something somehow feels out of place.

Mm, wait?

That reminds me, Lilith-san said something like that.

That the thing she hated the most in the world were the beings known as males.

"…"

That?

Is it that?

So Lilith-san… Extremely hates to be touched by me, who is a man?

"Sorry. I… It seems I was being insensible."

"… No. That's my line. You gracefully saved me and I repaid it by spewing harsh words.… I truly beg your pardon."

“Erm… Can I ask the reason?”

“Yes. Of what?”

“The reason why Lilith-san is scared of men.”

“…”

When I asked, she, after a little while, carefully started spinning her story.

“Before talking to you about that, there’s something I want to ask… Chiharu-sama, what’s the image you hold in regards to us, the succubus clan?”

“…”

“If you are being considerate to me, please stop. If you don’t speak truthfully, the story cannot progress.”

“How do I put it… It’s terribly difficult to answer that, but… An image of perverted women.”

“So it is. That’s the usual image people have of the succubus clan.”

Lilith-san shot a glance as if realizing something.

“Certainly, the sexual drive of us succubi, put into terms of the human world… Can be said to be twenty times the one of a male middle school student in the peak of his puberty, and there are many whose raison d’être is to copulate with men.

However, naturally, it’s not like every succubus fits into that design.

Among them there are some that, hurt by the conceptions of the society, have fallen into distrust of men.”

“Then… Is that the reason you started distrusting men, Lilith-san?”

"So it is. And to make thing worse… It seems my body is, from the start, one that easily attracts glances from men… So I've received terrible and heartless words from men. It wouldn't be once or twice that I was raped while taking a night stroll."

"…It must have been difficult."

"It's fine. I've already overcome those things."

"For reals?"

"Yeah. By carrying out my greatest ambition, I could settle that problem."

"… Ambition?"

"So it is. Did I tell you, Chiharu-sama?

My dream is to wipe the loser image of succubus=loose woman from the world.

By living my whole life without mingling with men and maintaining my body pure, working earnestly and succeeding in improving my career prospects, surely the men on the world are bound to think like that. 'Aah. Among the succubus clan there are also those who live a honest and diligent life.'"

"… That's a splendid idea."

Living her life in order to wipe out the image they hold of her clan… What?

Surely, there are lots of objectionable points in her way of thinking.

For starters, it's not likely that Lilith-san, by her sole effort, will change the image of the whole clan, and I feel it's wrong that she avoids men for that reason.

However, I cannot refute her ideas as she has told me about her dream with such an earnest gaze.

"But… I think that if things keep like this, Lilith-san's androphobia will be fixed?"

"… And why is that?"

"After all… Right now, aren't you being able to hold a conversation with me in such a dimly illuminated place?"

"… Ah."

"So… Don't worry. Lilith-san androphobia will soon…"

The moment right after I started talking.

Lilith-san, flinching as if she had noticed something,

"Kyaaaaaaaaaaaa!"

"Goheh!?"

It hit her as soon as I said it.

Ueh. I shouldn't… Have made her remember that…

"Fufufu. Misleading me… With dangerously nice words… You were about to rape me.

At last you show your true colors, Chiharu-sama.

You won't trick me!

Seducing girls like that up till now… How many poor maidens have you turned into your meat slaves!?"

"… S-stop saying things that could cause a misunderstanding."

"Silence! I shoulder the reputation of the succubus tribe… I'm not like those easy women you've won over until now.

…I won't make a peace sign in each hand as I let out a pleasure scream while riding your crotch!"

"…"

Peace sign, she says.

Come to think of it, Lilith-san said something a while ago.

The sex drive of succubi is twenty times the one of a male middle schooler in the peak of puberty or something.

Thinking about it calmly… That's a frightening number.

With that, let's build up a hypothesis.

That is… As it came to light on the conversation from a while ago, it seems she's an extreme masochist, her true character… Since she has to behave like an honor student in order to erase the image attached to her clan, doesn't that make her a closet pervert?

"Don't worry. At least, by me… Since I don't feel inclined to make you do something against your will."

"It's no use to try making me lower my guard with that! Men's words cannot be trusted!"

"…"

Alone with a big-breasted girl inside a hole with no one coming to the rescue.

Moreover, the other party is a peerless beauty.

That is, maybe if it was any normal boy he'd want to make even a single faux pas, but… It's me, who's had more experience than anyone in being beaten half to death. That's why I absolutely won't make a faux pas.

However, in this situation I won't be believed even if I say it.

"Understood. In that case, I'll face the wall until help comes. Will that make you feel relieved, Lilith-san?"

"… Wha?"

"If that's not enough, with this handkerchief… Yes. Just in case, I've bound my hands."

The special skill I hold of being able to get free from any binding… Conversely means I'm skilled at binding.

Of course, with just a single layer… If I wanted, I could shred it to pieces in an instant, but, even so, it should help Lilith-san to feel a little more relieved.

"If you see that I behave strangely… You can attack me from the back as you please. Like that, does it help to make you feel relieved?"

"… I-I don't understand what you say."

Lilith-san, in a state of total dumbfounding,

"Let's assume Chiharu-sama has no evil intentions… Why do you go so far for me… Who has been groundlessly accusing you?"

"Weeell… Do you promise you won't laugh?"

"… I do."

"How do I put it, I… It seems I have it in myself to not be able to ignore hardworking girls."

"… As I promised, I didn't laugh. Honestly, I had to endure greatly. That's truly an unfunny, uncool and lame line."

"…"

You didn't have to go that far.

"… However, it was so uncool that it looked like 'it went all the way round and it's even cool?'. I see, so this is Chiharu-sama's pick-up line."

"Nothing… It's not like that…"

"… How sly. Truly, from head to toe… You are the spitting image of that person."

Good.

If nothing else, in the end everything is all right.

It seems that I… Managed to calm Lilith-san without issue.

I feel curious about that “that person” Lilith-san mentioned at the end, but I wouldn’t dare to touch that.

More than that, I feel that prying in people’s pasts lacks delicacy.

With this and that, we—waited inside the hole for someone to help us without saying a word.

Chapter 4 - Value of existence

We were safely rescued by the hotel's personnel a while later.

That the communication device Lilith-san had brought hadn't broken with the impact of the fall was the silver lining on a dark cloud.

Being around two hours later than Zonmi and the rest, in the end I was brought to my room.

There, before my eyes, was an incomparably pointlessly super-deluxe suite room.

The ceiling was so high that you could play volley ball at that place, and the bed somewhat looked like one for a princess to sleep in, with attached curtains.

The point that personally struck my fancy were the flawless security measures.

The lock looks sturdy, so it should be difficult for Manami to make a night visit (<-this is important).

The perfect anti-sister countermeasures.

Since, while looking for something to change into, I found a folded yukata inside a chest of drawers I tried changing into it for now.

"How surprising. I'd never thought I'd come to wear a yukata at the Netherworld…"

I dare say this too is one of the achievements of the late Maou.

Lying on the bed like that, I waited for someone to come tell me it was time for dinner.

Checking the time with my cellphone, it's 8 p.m.

I don't know if there's a time difference between the Netherworld and the world of humans, but going by my internal clock, that has the accuracy of a Swiss radio clock, there's no doubt that it's time for dinner.

Being guided to the hotel's dining hall, we took a seat in a zashiki and, like that, we waited for our food.

“Uhehe. What kind of food will they bring in, oniichan?”

“I don’t know, but… Judging from the luxury of the room… Won’t they bring rich-class food?”

“And what kind of rich-class food, specifically?”

“Errrm… What is it…”

As I don’t usually grant myself luxuries, it’s a terribly difficult to answer that question.

“What kind of rich-class food… Kyouko.”

“… Eh? W-w-w-why do you pass it to me!?”

“I beg you! You are the only one I can rely on.”

Zonmi and Iris, who have lived at the Netherworld for a long time, have a slightly off sense of values.

“… Understood. If I have to answer, then I’ll answer.”

Glad to be relied on, Kyouko wasn’t as annoyed as she wanted us to believe.

“Yup. Please.”

“Eeeeeerm……
……
…… Salted salmon roe?”

“…”

“…”

“Wait a minute! How come you are looking at me with eyes full of pity!?”

“Kyouko… Poor child…”

“Oneechan… If you were going to go with fish roe, at least make it caviar.”

“Uuu… Being made a fool of by these siblings is terribly infuriating…”

While feeling like that for Kyouko, time flew by.

Has it been around 10 minutes since we took our seats? The maids that appeared before us started to line up dishes on the table one after another.

However.

“Oniichan… This seems…”

“… I see. Is this a joke?”

The meal that was brought in deserved to be called wretched.

If I have to sum each part up in a simple explanation—.

Something that looked like a frog with lots of eyes. Something that looked like a tiny human with grass growing on its head. Something that looked like a goat’s head. A soup with something that looked like a live water strider swimming on it. Raw meat (as for meat of what, I don’t have a clue).

… Since they have an instant effect of loss of appetite, they may be good for dieting.

If we talk about the only thing that looked edible among them, it should be the sorry quantity of what looked like bread rolls served on a basket.

Each serving of cooking brought made Kyouko & Manami & my (world of humans team) bodies tremble.

In contrast with us, Zonmi & Iris (Netherworld team) were keeping their cool.

“Wow. Sauté of hundred-eyed frog… Haven’t they brought something sumptuous?”

“Traditional local cuisine that makes you feel the good old Netherworld culture. It arouses your appetite.”

“…F-for reals?”

Since everything up till now wasn’t very different from the human world, I lowered my guard.

I was sure that, on the same roll, they’d come with Japanese style food…

“Then, without delay—bon appétit..”

Minding her manners, Zonmi started chewing on the raw meat before her.

What the heck. It’s too late, but… I feel that’s the first time I truly get what Zonmi being a monster means.

I mean… Raw meat? Don’t you know about fire?

No matter how fine it looks on the exterior, a pretty girl happily chewing on raw meat is something I want to avert my eyes from.

“Monster tamer… Is thy body all right?”

“… Ah. Yeah. It’s nothing. Let’s dig in.”

Since my hopes for the dinner have become nothing, there’s no other way.

Let’s leave the weird things to team Underworld, us team world of humans will go with the safe thing and eat just bread.

When, pulling myself together, I extended my hand to the inside of the basket—I noticed something unusual.

“…T-there’s no bread.”

Strangely, there was no bread.

Looking around in bewilderment, I saw Kyouko and Manami apologetically munching on bread.

"… Ah! Since there were so few, before I knew… Sorry… This was first come, first served…"

"I mean, Manami is a human! I don't want to eat such a femininity lowering food!"

"…"

It seems that while I was nonchalantly checking on the food they were bringing, the four girls have ended up eating all the bread inside the basket, and speaking about my share, there was none left.

"Oniichan. It's fine. Don't worry. ♪"

Manami winked at me, who had my shoulders down in dejection.

"Manami… Could it be that… Your own share…"

Will you give me part of your meager share…?

A-a goddess!

A goddess has descended!

“If there’s no bread, then eat frog!”

“Damn!”

I’m an idiot for expecting something from her!

“… Kuh.”

Since it has come to this… I can’t but accept my fate.

Thinking normally, simply missing dinner may not seem a problem, but you can’t make fun of a male high schooler’s appetite.

I’m really hungry from playing at the beach all day long.

“I-I give up being humaaan!”

Instigated by my sister, I made a decision; I cut a piece from the closest frog with lots of eyes (Iris called them hundred-eyed frogs) and put it in my mouth.

What will happen?

“… Delicious!”

It was surprisingly delicious.

The collagen-like eyes that seemed to slide down my throat had a richer flavor than I thought and tasted like freshly squeezed milk.

Sure, they may look a bit like that, but… In the human world there are also strange foodstuff that are considered delicacies.

Going straight to the point, after that, I challenged the Netherworld dishes one by one.

Since all of them were delicious, before I knew it I was eating them with gusto.

“‘“Blergh—””

To me, who was straying more and more from being human, Manami sent glares of open scorn.

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“… Something’s weird.”

I first noticed it after I came back from the toilet.

Something’s weird… With their spirits.

It’s especially obvious with Zonmi & Kyouko.

Zonmi’s yukata is slightly disheveled, and she’s showing a sexy appearance with her bra straps exposed.

Kyouko, also in a similar condition, was even humming.

“Erm… What the heck’s happening here?”

I tried asking a maid that coincidentally passed by.

The maid smiled wryly,

“I reckon they are under the effects of a specialty of the Netherworld, Tengu’s Clear Water.”

“… Tengu’s Clear Water?”

How come they drank such a suspicious thing… Ah!

“Could it be the water that was inside the glasses?”

“Yes. Tengu’s Clear Water, despite tasting roughly the same as regular water, possesses a strong power of magical power recuperation.

Besides, it’s a high-class item that is good for your health, has a relaxing effect and also strengthens sexual desire.

… However, if drank by unaccustomed people, due to the excess dopamine and serotonin secreted by the brain, their consciousness…”

“So, in easy to understand words… These guys are drunk?”

“That’s what it comes to.”

“… I see. Thanks for the explanation.”

Well, now.

What do I do?

Since we’ve almost eaten up everything already, I’m willing to put an end to the dinner like this, but…

The problem here is, how will these drunkards return to their rooms?

Even though we are well acquainted, being nursed by the male me… I don’t know if I will be told off later.

I’ll better go with the safe way and discuss it with Lilith-san.

Set on that, when I turned back.

“… Chiharu… Where are you going?”

I was stopped by the drunk Zonmi (with glassy eyes).

“Where… I’m going to Lilith-san…”

“Again, you’re going to another woman?… So… Do you prefer big-busted girls?…”

Zonmi’s stare grew cold.

“… You don’t have to say it so full of spite.”

“No. You always give some reason, Chiharu… You wander there. You wander here. Isn’t it like you don’t have fidelity?… *HICCUP*”

“…”

Befuddled by the drink, she grabbed my arm close.

“Chiharu… You should be more faithful. Once again, returning to the beginning, you should reward me for being your first contract.”

“Reward… And what should I specifically do?”

When I asked, Zonmi looked at me with upturned eyes,

“… Please never ever leave my side… Don’t make me feel anxious.”

She clung to my arm.

“~~~~~!!”

Defeated.

If you tell me those things, even I could misunderstand…

“Or else… Am I not enough? You are not satisfied only with me, Chiharu?”

“It’s not like that. Zonmi is there, always helping me.”

“Ehehe.”

Zonmi, while rubbing her cheek to my arm in a good mood, just said.

“Chiharu… I like you.”

“…”

Ca-calm down.

Let’s think it through calmly. In this case, “like”… Has the meaning of something like “I like you as a friend” or “I like you as a contract partner”.

Even if it had the meaning of “I like you as a man”, since, as you see, Zonmi is completely wasted, it’s not like she’s saying what she really feels.

In any case… this may be the first time a girl has looked me in the eye and told me “I like you”. Surprisingly, I feel that not even Manami had straightly confessed to me with an “I like you”.

“M-me too… I like Haru?”

I looked at the source of the voice, and there were panties.

“W-what’s the matter, Kyouko!?”

For some reason, Kyouko had entirely taken off her yukata—in her undies, it seems she’s breathing a bit roughly.

“… Somehow, my body’s hot… I’ve drunk lots of water, but… I totally can’t cool down. Uhehe.”

“…”

I see.

Not knowing that the water in the glass is the source of the heat in her body, to chill out, she drank water once more?

As a result… She has ended up dead drunk.

“Haru… How’s it? How’s my underwear?”

“… No. Nothing special.”

Am I imagining things?

This situation looks like something I’ve experienced before…

“In case something happened during this trip… Hang on, I tried to choose something sexy?”

“I-is that so…”

Certainly, to the Japanese Kyouko, these panties based on pink&black make her seem more adult-like than usual.

I can’t recognize her.

Kyouko’s panties, compared with the quality of her usual ones—.

Have experienced… A quick evolution…

"… Ku! How incorrigible, panties, panties… Was there a big bargain on panties, you?!"

"Uuu. Bargain… It's true that before I used to buy underwear of 3 for 1000 yen at the local department store, but… I now diligently spend money on my undies!?"

"…"

I don't have a clue.

What the heck are these two talking about?

"… Anyway, put some clothes on right now. Or else, I won't let you get near Chiharu!"

"Shut up! Be quiet, ghoul! Now it's my turn! Haven't you totally appealed to him just now?!"

"… Ku!"

"…"

Turn, she says.

Since when do you have to pick your turn to speak with me?

Somehow, Zonmi has put a "you've got a point" face before Kyouko's claim.

"Hey… Haru…"

Hearing the strangely coquettish voice of my childhood friend, I got unconsciously nervous.

"W-what?"

"Do I have no charm?"

"No. I think that you're totally charming, but…"

"Lies."

"It's not like…"

“Then, why haven’t you ever put a finger on me?”

“Th-that’s…”

Perhaps, I’m also drunk.

Though they are nasty words even for me, I spilled my true thoughts that I had tried too hard until now to not say to them.

“You are a monster and I’m a human… so…”

“…”

The moment Kyouko heard my speech, her face clouded, and she finally showed a smile that just said “as expected”.

“Understood. Haru has been holding back since he thinks it’s unethical for humans and monsters to marry, isn’t it?”

“… T-to be frank, that’s how it goes.”

“But, If that’s the problem, hasn’t it been solved? Since, look, Haru right here is a demon-human crossbreed… Monster, I gather."

“… Ah!”

How come I didn’t notice something so obvious?

Up till now, I’ve been automatically working to keep my reason no matter how charming as women these girls were, using the racial wall between monsters and humans.

However, now’s different.

Just as Kyouko has said, since I’m now aware that in me flows half the blood of a monster, there’s no need to feel at loss before romance.

Thinking like that, I suddenly became conscious of the girls before me and I noticed my face becoming hot.

“Fufu. It works, it works. Once more…”

“…”

Co-could it be that I… Am dancing on Kyouko’s palm!?

How come?

This is something I haven’t felt before any other girl… I get an incredible feeling of having lost at being played with by Kyouko.

“S-stop!

Right after I thought like that.

With an unsteady gait, Zonmi got between Kyouko and I.

“Wha, I told you not to hinder me during my turn!”

“You can’t, you can’t! Anyway, you can’t! I don’t know about turns and such, but going further… Stop approaching Chiharu and me!”

“And why?”

“That’s… Because I am his very first contract partner! And since I’m his very first contract partner… Chiharu must treat me as the most important! People that came later please leave!”

“…Wha!”

It seems that Kyouko has something to say to that.

“Who has come later?! You… You know nothing about Haru!”

“The time you’ve know him and the depth of your trust are not related. Being Chiharu’s initial partner… I’m the one who’s able to know Chiharu the best.”

“Humph! Surely it may be as you say and the most important thing is not how long one has known him… But! If that’s what you propose, then the order of the contracts doesn’t matter!”

“Th-that’s…”

Kyouko's remark left Zonmi at a loss of words.

In the end, Zonmi put on a resigned face.

"…Very well. Nephilim. Since you are willing to go to that extent, let's decide here and now if you are suitable as Chiharu's partner!"

"What."

How has it come to this!?

"As you wish!"

"…"

Still in a state of excitation, Kyouko agreed to Zonmi's proposal.

… Why did I keep looking at both of them without saying a word?

That is, if those two who had the power of monsters seriously battle, the surroundings could get destroyed to the point it couldn't be recovered, but… Just this time, it's different.

"Tah! Tah!"

"Ei! Ei!"

Zonmi & Kyouko were exchanging blows as they yelled unintelligible mumblings at each other.

Maybe due to the tipsiness, their power was at a cute level.

… Regarding the change of personality when drunk, humans and monsters are alike.

Is this what they call *gap moe*?

It was moving seeing those two acting with a simple-mindedness usually unthinkable from them.

"… Now that I think about it, Manami has been awfully quiet."

Looking around, I saw my sister looking down in a corner of the table.

Could it be that, after Zonmi and Kyouko, even my sister is showing a *gap moe* different from usual?

It's that usually excessively bold and active Manami.

I personally find it a bit clichéd, but usually willful women, when drunk, are the type who change to the point so meek that it makes you want to protect them… Just thinking of seeing that makes my heart throb, but… As expected, isn't that wishful thinking?

"Ufufu. Oniichan… Waity. I'll prepare you *wakamezake* asap."

"…"

I see.

If I think about looking down, I wonder what will I see.

Wouldn't it be better if you change your character a little more?

Though I'm worried about the drunk girls, my sister's *wakamezake* alone is not included.

In the end I left the place in the hands of the maids and I got out from there alone.

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Where is the toilet?

Having left alone from the dining hall, I was looking for the toilet.

My head was a little fuzzy and my body felt hot.

It seems that the Tengu's water has got even to me and I felt that my thinking wasn't working properly.

"… So, why don't we cooperate?"

A somewhat familiar husky voice.

Softly opening the door of the room the voice came from, there was the unexpected combination of the RisLith combo: Lilith-san and Iris.

"I refuse. I cannot place my trust in demons."

"Why don't you reconsider it? This talk benefits both of us."

"…"

What the heck are those two talking about?

From the mood, it's some serious talk, if I'm not wrong.

"I'll say it once again.

Please employ the contract ring we've especially prepared to make a contract with Chiharu-sama.

If there is someone as powerful as you, a red dragon, at his side, naturally the safety of Chiharu-sama's body can be guaranteed."

"!?"

What Lilith-san is holding in her hand is undoubtedly a contact ring glittering in silver.

What a surprise.

Could it be that like this comes around my chance to make a contract?

“No matter how, I cannot comprehend. Why dost thou obsess to such lengths with that lad?

If he’s a mere chimera between human and demon… But I don’t think that’s reason enough to receive so much hospitality.”

“… I can’t understand either. Weren’t you the one that wanted to make a contract with Chiharu-sama more than anyone else? Why… What do you not agree?”

“It’s deeply unpleasant. What thou art looking at it’s not me—”

Just when Iris was about to say something.

My gaze, while secretly peeping from behind the door, and Iris’s gaze met.

“…”

Iris, coming here with her head down, violently opened the door,

“… Forgetest what thou hast just heard.”

She muttered that as she parted.

… Why has Iris refused making a contract with me?

Moreover, what Iris almost said… It’s just a hunch, but it seems like it has to do with her self… I can’t help but feel that there are some deep circumstances.

“Chiharu-sama… You were there?”

“Sorry. I didn’t intend to eavesdrop, but…”

“No. There’s no problem.”

Lilith-san, “fiuu…”, sighing, sat on the couch.

Following her example, I took a seat in front of her and voiced my question.

“Erm… Following the talk of just now… Why does Lilith-san intend to endorse our contract?”

“That’s easy. Your existence is more valuable than you can imagine. Hereafter, it can be supposed that chances are high that bad people set their aims on your body. That’s why, if you make a contract with a being of superior battle prowess—a red dragon, that perfectly means that the risk can be diminished.”

“…”

It’s true that, since coming here, I’ve been informed of the rarity of my existence.

“… And why has Iris refused that?”

“Honestly, that was beyond my expectations.

Though this is no more than a personal guess… As the last survivor of the red dragons, she’s subjected to racial discrimination that cannot be compared to that of us succubus… She may have some darkness inside her heart.”

“…”

Until I came here, it seems I couldn’t understand Iris’s feelings— having all of her comrades, except her, slaughtered.

However.

Only now I feel I can understand a little.

Since I, too… Have found I’m a monster completely alone, with no one else in the world.

“Chiharu-sama… May I ask you a single favor?”

“… What is it?”

“Please take… These contract rings.”

“…”

What Lilith-san handed to me as she said that were, no different from the ones I’m already wearing… A pair of contract rings.

“During this trip, I want you to open Iris-sama’s heart… And make a contract using these rings. I’d say you are the only one that can erase the darkness from that child’s heart.”

“What a coincidence. Had Lilth-san not said that, I’d have asked it myself instead. That request… I’ll gladly fulfill it.”

To shorten the distance between Iris and me.

That—was what I intended with this trip to the Underworld.

If I think about it, when I received the letter from my mother… When choosing the trip members, that happened.

I unconsciously excluded Iris from the list… Thinking back, that was disgusting.

Honestly speaking, I feel like there’s an open gap between Iris and I.

Zonmi, Kyouko and Iris, all of them… As they are comrades met in the same circumstances, this is weird.

With renewed decision, I — put the contract rings I received from Lilith-san inside my pocket.

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At the same time, in another place.

This is the threshold between the human world and the Netherworld.

Inside an old tower erected in the middle of a desolate wasteland, there was the hideout of the Black Tamers.

"… Then, even that fellow Noelle ran away back in defeat after being beaten black and blue by Kusumi Chiharu… Moreover, she even released the limiter without the proper authorization…"

The man who holds a speck of doubt on the procedures of the organization—Clarie Shernfelt confronted his own superior.

"…So says the report."

"Boss… I can't believe it."

The man shook his head and muttered,

"Don't Firsts like Noelle have a power comparable to that of a high class rank monster tamer? This exceeds the level of just talent.

Kusumi Chiharu… Who the heck is he?

Why, being a Rookie, does he hold a combat ability on the level of a high class monster tamer!?"

"Before I answer your question, there's something I want to make sure of. Clarie… Can you repeat to me what's the reason why us Black Tamers exist?"

"… Yes. To put the monsters under the total control of humanity… The creation of that Arcadia is our noble objective."

"… By what means?"

"By bringing forth humans with a combat capability that surpasses monsters… To create superhumans. To insert monster's cells in the human body, we need to calculate the rate of compatibility with the human body. For that, we used enforce to gather numerous samples of monsters."

"… That's right. As a result, we discovered a pattern on the compatibility rate of the monster cells with the human body and achieved a power that transcends humanity."

"Yeah. Though our numbers are less than those of the IMAthose guys, our individual battle prowess is already superior. It's just a matter of time until the human world falls in our hands…"

"… I wonder if it's time to tell you too… But, I called you now in order to tell you."

After that introduction, the masked woman,

"Everything we've done until now, Kusumi Chiharu's existence has rendered it to nothing."

Blurted that succession of shocking words.

"…H-how come!?"

"I shall answer your initial question. Kusumi Chiharu's true identity is that of a chimera born from a demon and a human."

"!?"

Clarie couldn't hide his commotion before the masked woman's words.

A chimera between a monster and a human.

Since the dawn of history, that has been regarded as genetically impossible.

It's not unusual for a child to be born between a human and a monster.

However, Clarie couldn't acknowledge the facts before him.

"… I can't believe it so right off the bat. Monster genes are usually far stronger than those of humans, so the children born from a human and a monster are one hundred percent monsters… Isn't that what's widely acknowledged!?"

"It's mostly as you've said."

The masked woman, after confirming that,

“However, I’m afraid to say that his birth mother is not a regular human.

The Immortal Tamer.

That—is the moniker the Association gave his mother.”

“!? It can’t be… The high level monster tamer that’s regarded as a living legend…!?”

“Yep. I don’t know the details, that’s the only thing I can say with certainty.

Her uncommon magic power let her give birth to a chimera between monster and human… It made such an unprecedented irregularity occur…”

“…!”

Clarie completely stifled his half-hearted thoughts.

“Just ten years… Had he been born ten years earlier… Maybe that would have not happened…”

“… It’s no use crying over spilled milk. Anyway, wouldn’t his existence be a substantial shortcut to our Arcadia project? What we shall do from here on, do you know without me explaining it in detail?”

“… Yessir! I’ll definitely bring Kusumi Chiharu before you without delay!”

The masked woman chuckled,

“I’m afraid to say that’s not possible.

It’s quite inopportune, but… That lot is currently at the main touristic island of the Netherworld, Grandeel, lodging in a hotel managed by devils.”

“Do you mean… There’s someone among them that has anticipated our actions?”

“Yep. Be very careful they don’t trip you.

Clarie. This time, I'll let you take five of the First that account for 30% of the Black Tamer's battle power, except the Soul Tamer.

It's OK? The battle this time is not only for capturing Kusumi Chiharu… It's also a rehearsal for the soon-to-be all-out war against the IMA.

You've got permission to release the limiter, and even the Level Overlimiter."

"Yessir! Everything is for the coming of our Arcadia."

"…"

The conflict that is about to happen is unlike anything till now.

The masked woman, believing in the success of her strategy, on the other hand doesn't plan for everything to unfold without problem… She held half-contradictory feelings.

(… The person who holds the seed for the coming of our Arcadia, it would be boring if he was so easily captured.)

The masked woman, from the throne, let out a daring smile,

(Terribly… Interesting. This time maybe I'll personally go to the frontlines…)

She quietly made that decision.

Chapter 5 - Iris's circumstances

2nd day of living in the Netherworld.

Though in the morning, same as the previous day, we played around at the demon-exclusive private beach, from afternoon on, we went sightseeing as we bought things for dinner.

It stemmed from yesterday's dinnertime.

Since, not liking the Netherworld dishes served by the hotel staff, my sister filed a complaint, the expert cooks at the hotel, unfamiliar with human's world cuisine, were at a complete loss about what kind of food to serve.

Then, following Lilith-san's "why don't you try choosing the food you shall eat?" suggestion, we came all the way to the Netherworld's shopping district.

It seems that there are two places on this island with supermarkets that carry human world's foodstuff, so we had to split into two teams to purchase all of the needed ingredients.

Since we didn't have the time to discuss how to split the teams, we decided through a lottery made by Lilith-san.

The results of the lottery.

Me & Iris.

Zonmi & Kyouko & Manami.

We were split into those two teams.

I bet that Lilith-san has rigged the results.

If not, going so well with what happened yesterday… There's no way these results came out.

Let's make use of Lilith-san's assistance with gratitude.

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So, the chance has come to close the gap with Iris, but—.

“…”

“…”

Guuuh. The conversation is not very lively.

Come to think of it, (since I’ve entered high school) this may be the first time.

Going out shopping, just the two of us alone like this…

“Hey… Iris.”

“… What dost thou want?”

“Nice weather today…”

“So it seems.”

“Haha… Haha.”

“…”

“…”

And the conversation has ceased once again.

I thought that my resistance to girls had gone up a little since Zonmi started freeloading at my place… It seems I was mistaken.

“Wha? That’s right, you are not wearing your usual robe today?”

While going by trial and error to stretch the conversation, I blurted that question.

Iris's clothes for today were a *chic* modern girl combination of a miniskirt and leggings on a plaid parka.

"… Right now at this place, there's no way I can don such a thing. Those are garments handed down from the red dragon bloodline."

"? Isn't it usually the opposite?"

Despite the Netherworld having been dyed in the human world's culture… This is indeed a different world.

Looking around the area, I could see a half-human half-horse monster pulling a big cart and something like a pterosaur soaring the skies.

The red robes Iris usually wears (though out of place at the human world), they could be worn without it standing out here in the Netherworld.

"…"

"…"

This is bad.

Iris, head down and in silence, won't lift her eyes.

Could it be that I, once again… Have stepped on an outrageous landmine?

Noticing something strange, I harbored that doubt.

"… Ah."

Wrong.

It's not like Iris casts her glance downwards with a hurt countenance.

This is… The same reaction she showed on the first day, when she was surrounded by that battalion of maids.

Pale-faced, Iris' figure, walking with an unsteady gait… It was as if she was scared of something.

But, why?

What the heck is Iris scared of?

… I could understand the reason while listening to the surrounding sounds.

“Hey. Isn’t that girl, by a chance… A red dragon?” “No way! Weren’t the red dragons annihilated?” “It seems a single child survived… That may be that girl.”

“Doesn’t the blood of a red dragon fetch a high price? If I abduct that girl I may become filthy rich.” ”Moron… Stop it…”

Those were curiosity-filled glances thrown at Iris.

Are you… Joking…?

Iris… Just because being born in the red dragon tribe… Has to… Be subjected to public glares like this as if it was completely normal?

Somehow… Since I was brought to Iris’s den, I had been holding a doubt.

The hut at the peak of a mountain where Iris lives, having some lived-in feeling, doesn’t seem like it’s a one-time temporary dwelling.

Surely Iris… May have been living in the human world since before I was appointed as a monster tamer.

If it is like that… Why would Iris have chosen to live in the human world out of her own will?

I think I now know the reason.

Iris, just by walking like this in the Netherworld… Surrounded by one-sided pity directed to her… Sometimes subjected to glares filled with desire… Without doubt, it must have been very taxing on her.

That’s why… Even if it means being alone… She must have chosen to live in the human world.

“… Iris?”

Taking a peek to Iris’s face, walking next to me… Big fat tears were piling up in her eyes.

Aah.

If I could, I’d like to send flying all of them who are making Iris the theme of their conversation.

However.

Doing that wouldn’t solve anything.

Instead, making a big fuss—will only open the wounds wider.

… Sniff.

Sniff. Sniff. Sniff. Sniff. Sniff!

I'm mad that, despite the girl before me having been hurt, I can't do nothing but look from the side as a spectator.

Anything. Can't I do anything?

To help the girl before me, a satisfactory way—

…

……

I think and think.

This useless junk of a brain of mine doesn't give me a clear answer.

Not knowing what's the best I could do—

Before I knew it, I had removed my clothes.

"Hey, look… That dude."

"Uwah… The worst."

"Could it be… An exhibitionist?"

I felt how, instantly, all the curiosity-filled glanced directed at Iris turned to me.

… I understand.

Even if I do this, it's not like it will solve the basics.

However, if my actions help in lessening the burden on Iris… I want to do anything I can for her.

"Wha, whawha. Thou… What are thou doing!??"

In the end, noticing something amiss in her surroundings, Iris, in a flustered tone, hastily showed dismay.

“Hehe! Don’t you know? At the human world, in areas near the shore… Isn’t it not weird to wander outside in swimsuit?”

“… E-even if it’s like that, what need did thou have to disrobe right now!?”

“My bad. It seems the Netherworld’s Sun is too hot for me…”

“What art thou saying!? About the Netherworld’s Sun… Aren’t its rays weak enough for the ghoul to wander aro…”

Stopping mid-sentence, it seems that Iris has realized my intention.

Iris, with her cheeks furiously blushing out of character, mumbled something unintelligibly.

“Though thy feelings make me glad… Put on thy garments quickly. To me, walking besides a man with his upper body in the nude… It’s embarrassing.”

“… OK.”

Since it seems she really dislikes it, I put my clothes on in a flash.

So that’s it.

It may be stating the obvious, but… As expected, it’s embarrassing for Iris to walk besides a half-naked man.

“… About that. Thank thee.”

“Mm? Did you say something?”

“N-no, I didn’t say anything. Monster tamer… This grudge thou hast shamed a noble red dragon like me… ‘Twill cost thee greatly.”

Though this tactic has ended in a magnificent blunder… Speaking from the results, it seems that it’s not like my actions have been totally useless.

The actions this time may have been more conspicuous than ever.

And with this it’s case closed… Saying that with confidence, I can agree with it by far. From then on, Iris, not paying attention to the surrounding glances, recovered her usual mood.

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Having concluded the shopping without further issue, today’s dinner was very normal, totally unlike the one from the previous night.

It’s been a long time since we could have such a decent meal!

With that, Kyouko & Manami’s spirits lifted.

About it, isn’t this enough to last till the day after tomorrow’s dinner?

Since we’ve bought so much ingredients, we won’t be able to taste the Netherworld’s foodstuff for quite a while.

Although thinking that makes me a little sad, if I ate Netherworld’s cuisine every day, sooner or later, since I'll have lost the sense of normalcy of the human world, I feel that I’ll get pulled to this side.

“Chiharu. Have you thought of your plans for tomorrow?”

Said Zonmi, munching with her cheeks full of her favorite karaage.

“That’s riiight. Since we’ve expressly come to the Underworld, tomorrow I had though about stretching my legs and go around seeing places.”

“I see. Sightseeing?”

“By the way, Zonmi, is your hometown far from here?”

“Is that so? To tell the truth, it’s not so far. Riding on a boat at the harbor, wouldn’t it be half a day?”

“I see. Isn’t it just a tad too far?”

“… Though I’m glad that Chiharu shows interest in the ghouls… Speaking frankly, I think it’s better that you give up.”

“Why?”

“Since, Chiharu, be that as it may, your little sister has to accompany us, the danger is too great.

As this area is a neutral zone made for the tourists, it’s safe, but there are many in the Netherworld who hold no good feelings against humans.”

“… Is that so?”

“Yeah. To be exact, currently the Netherworld’s public order can be said to be the worst in a long time. After all, there is no Maou ruling over the Netherworld.”

“Exactly. Chiharu-sama.”

Lilith-san, who was looking at us dining, butted in.

“I briefly explained it to you before, but currently we are in a critical state of division between conservatives, who want to maintain the status quo in the Netherworld, and the reformists, who want the Netherworld to invade and control the human world.

Due to that fact, I beg you that you don't leave the island for the duration of this trip."

"… Understood."

It's not like I wanted to leave this island that much.

Let's meekly accept the warning from the two.

After that.

The ideas we discussed for our plans for tomorrow didn't come together—.

In the end, with the plans for tomorrow still undecided, that day's dinner came to an end.

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"I know! Let's all watch a movie!"

Having finished dinner, not knowing what to do with our free time, with that suggestion from my sister, we all gathered at the hotel's theater room.

Seeing Manami getting her long-awaited opportunity like that, we just made a wry smile.

I'd say it comes from the hate she holds for Zonmi.

The DVD package my sister has brought from the human world, that has the title "Dokidoki☆Zombie panic" printed over a cheap looking logo, reeked of a B-series movie.

The plot of the movie was simply the female middle schooler main character—Airi (Is it my imagination? I've heard the name somewhere) going around trashing zombies with heavy armament.

Frankly speaking, the story line is unlike any other I've seen, but… Strangely, the lack of plot twists may be a good thing instead.

By cutting on the plot, the action scenes of the female middle schooler heroine that are the selling point become more prominent and the work in itself gained in quality.

… The only big blunder is that, since each time they trashed a zombie my sister laughed holding her sides while signaling Zonmi with the finger, we couldn't concentrate on the movie.

Since it's a public facility, Zonmi couldn't do anything but keep holding her rage, but… It would be fearful if a zombie☆panic happened in the real world.

"? Now that I think about it, where has Iris gone to?"

The movie's final stage.

Around the shocking scene where the main character, Airi, drove a dump truck while letting out a strange voice, running over the zombie hordes that kept popping out, I realized that Iris had disappeared unnoticed.

"… Now that you mention it, I can't find her."

"If you mean Iris-chan, it seems that she left the room a little while ago."

"Really!?"

"Yeah. But she looked like she didn't felt well, I wonder if her tummy hurt…"

"Sorry. I have to… Go to the toilet for a bit."

"Eeh!? Isn't it right now at the best part!?"

"Aah. It seems I got myself carried away and ate too much for dinner."

"Haru… Are you all right? Since yesterday you ate only those weird things…"

"Aah. Thanks for your concern. I'm fine."

With those words, I left the room.

I'm curious about how the movie continues, but what I have to do right now is something else.

But, is that so?

My goal for this trip is “to know Iris”.

To understand her… I feel like I can't miss anything that makes her uneasy or miss anything that feels amiss.

I honestly don’t have a clue about where Iris could have gone, but… She mustn’t have gone very far away.

If I search thoroughly, I may find her.

Making my resolve, I started randomly running through the long corridor.

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I managed to determine Iris’s whereabouts very fast.

After a quick search, I could see the curtain at the end of the corridor fluttering with the wind.

When I went through the window, there was Iris, leaning her body on the balcony’s banister.

Iris, her hair let down straight, gazed at the scenery while lost in her thoughts.

Surrounded by a wondrous aura under the moonlight, Iris looked more mature than usual.

With that sight, that looked as if it had been taken straight out from a scene in a movie or a drama, my heart unconsciously started to beat faster.

“Iris!”

As if she had noticed my presence beforehand, Iris looked back in silence without showing the slightest surprise.

“… Why art thou here?”

“That’s my line! Why did you leave by yourself…?”

“No reason. If pushed, I just wanted to feel the nocturnal breeze.”

“… That’s a lie, isn’t it?”

“…”

“I… Want to know your true feelings. Look… I’m an idiot. If you don’t put it into words, I won’t know.”

“Thou wantest to know my true feelings… Thou sayest?”

Iris eyes became sharp.

From those eyes came alternatively a fierce wrath and a tinge of sadness… Once again, it made me come to understand that her life was altogether different from the one we had.

“And what dost thou plan to do with me?

As I warned thee before, I don’t take ye as “comrades” nor “friends”. Since the start, I had no need for such things.”

“…”

Iris didn’t consider us as “comrades” nor “friends”.

Those words have honestly been a shock to me, but… I could think otherwise.

If she doesn’t regards us as “comrades”… From now on I should make her consider us as such.

“In that case… Let me tell you something. Why do you, with such obstinacy… Reject us?”

“… That’s.”

“At least I… Have always thought of you as a cherished comrade.

That’s why what I say may be being pushy, but… Can’t I, at least, make that clear to you?”

As I asked with a serious tone, right after Iris slowly opened her mouth.

“Gaining something and losing something, that’s the same.”

“… What does that mean?”

When I asked, Iris, lifting her eyes to the starry sky of the Netherworld, started telling me with a calm voice.

“In the Netherworld there doesn’t exist such concept as eternal.

Therefore, if something is to be gained, conversely something else must be lost.

Maybe thou still dostn’t know, but something irreplaceable to me—that I believed would eternally continue, simply became nothing.

If that radiance was to be lost—I didn’t have a need for it since the start.”

“But, that’s not how life…”

“Life is not fun… Didst thou want to say something of the like?”

“… Am I wrong?”

“Since the start, my aim in life… My desire was to exert revenge for my kin—just that. Anything outside that accounts to nothing but rubbish. Therefore… I don’t need things like comrades… That’s the answer to thy former question. Does it please thee?”

“…”

I’d say that those were her honest thoughts. Each and every word she said had an emphasis that makes me think so.

“Although, incidentally, I’ll tell thee.”

Iris, turning back,

“The reason I sneaked out from that chamber was that… Seeing yonne sort of thing, I found it revolting.”

“…? That sort of thing?”

“The atrocity of an unilateral extermination of a race.

Of course, I tried to comprehend it. That’s just a fictional tale…

Nevertheless, I ended up recollecting bad things. When my kin was exterminated by the Black Tamers—about that day—“

Just by saying the name of the enemies of her clan, the Black Tamers, Iris feelings steadily became highly strung.

“About that day… Even now I can clearly recall it.

The choking stench of blood. The screams of my brethren calling for help. And, above all… The powerless me that could do nothing.”

Aah. Now I understand.

Iris, due to that senseless massacre, her family, her friends… All that, countless precious things, she lost it all at once.

That’s why, she’s become really scared of losing something.

Since she fears she’ll lose something dear… From the start, she won’t hold anything as such.

Then, for that, she’s erected a wall between us.

“Now, dost thou understand?

What I want is to obtain strength to exert revenge for my kin—if I could make a contract with thou and obtain thy magic power… I’ll be over with thee already. I believe just in one thing—mine own strength.”

“Aah. I understand your thoughts well.”

“… Is that so? If thou understandest, henceforth abstain from useless conta—“

“In other words… If I keep living without dying, can I become your friend, Iris?”

“… Wha!”

Before my question, Iris rose a disarrayed yell.

“Thou, didestn’t thou comprehend not one of my words!?”

“… Am I wrong? Isn’t that the idea behind the ‘gaining something and losing something, that’s the same’ that you said?”

“… I see. Thy words hold some truth.

However, monster tamer. Thy idea has a big lack as a hypothesis.

That is, who shall guarantee thou shalt not die?”

“Ahaha. That’s fine. Since I won’t die.”

“That’s why… Show me thy foundation for that…!”

Before the open irritation of Iris, I just said.

“Because you will protect me!”

“… Hah!?”

An extra-large question mark floated above Iris’s head.

“that is, didn’t you say it yourself, Iris? You only believe in your strength. That’s why, when I’m in a pinch, you’ll save me. Aren’t red dragons the most powerful monsters? Your strength is tremendous. Having you by my side, how could I die?”

"… Nu! Thou, art not thou embarrassed by saying that nonsense? U-usually shouldn't our stances be reverted?

Thou who art male… Shouldest not protect me, a female!? Dostn't thou find it embarrassing?"

"… Nope. I don't find it so. Because I, in exchange… When you are in a pinch, I'll run by your side and protect you!"

"…"

"At least I… I regard you as someone precious… On the level of my own life.

I promise you. I… It may be impossible right now, but one day… I'll become someone able to protect you with my life. So. Since losing is not an option… Won't you reconsider not needing friends?"

"… Dost thou really think like that?"

Iris glared at me with an inquisitive look.

"Of course. So… Iris. Stay with me forever."

I said while extending my hand to Iris, as if to shake hands.

… That's fine. There are many things I want to say to you.

Even so, I wonder if my words have strung Iris's heart… But that's another matter.

So, did I?

I think it's not difficult to change the sense of values of another person with one's own words.

So, in just minutes… In the span of tens of minutes, that person should change the feelings they've fostered for all their lives.

Needless to say, like Iris… The childhood trauma that twisted their beliefs is not superficial.

“Let me think about it for a bit.”

How much time has passed?

Iris, who had her head hung in silence, sighed and muttered that.

“… Understood.”

I’d say my questioning until now has backfired.

As expected, making Iris open her heart is something out of ordinary.

Let her think about it for a bit… Isn’t it?

However, if I think of how Iris was when I met her… Isn’t it a bit of improvement?

“… It seems we’ve been talking while standing a bit too much.”

As soon as she said that, Iris left the balcony, as if running away from me.

Though I was curious about what face Iris would put after my once-in-a-lifetime confession…

I couldn’t check Iris’s expression as she ran away with quick feet.

Chapter 6 - The beginning of the end

“By the way, oniichan, when will we go back?”

Next morning.

While we were having breakfast at the hotel, that question came from my sister’s lips.

“… Well. Since it was written on the tour ticket sent by mom that it was 4 days and 3 nights… Maybe around the day after tomorrow?”

“But, you know. Come to think of it, does it still matter what the ticket said?”

“Well… That’s true.”

“To tell the truth… I’m also worried about that. We can’t text to the human world from the Netherworld… I have to contact daddy soon.”

“Is that so? Why don’t we ask Lilith-san about bringing forward a bit the date of return?”

“There’s no need for that.”

“… Ah! Lilith-san. None too soon.”

As usual, Lilith-san appeared at an unexpected time from a unexpected place.

“So… What do you mean by not having to worry about it?”

“Since you all will be staying in the Netherworld for some more time.”

“Some more… How many days are we talking about?”

“… Let’s see. If things go well, maybe you will leave the Netherworld in 3 years’ time?”

“T-three years!?”

“Yeah. By the way, I meant three years would be if things go well… Assuming the worst case, you’ll spend all your lives in the Netherworld.”

"… Erm, of course that's a joke, isn't it?"

"No. I'm being serious. What need do I have to lie to you?"

"…"

Hearing Lilith-san saying it wasn't a joke, the cheerful atmosphere from a while ago changed abruptly.

As if it were a lie, the mood became gloomy.

"… Good grief, that's stupid."

Said Zonmi, slamming the chopsticks she was eating with against the table.

"Even though I'm indifferent about returning, to reach the world of humans from here you just have to get done with some formalities.

Chiharu… You don't need to listen to what she's saying. Come on, let's retrieve our luggage. We'll leave from here this very morning."

"Hey. Zonmi, wait!"

I held back Zonmi, who was leaving without a word.

At least… It's not too late to listen a bit more about what's happening.

"I see. Even if you really want to leave, it's still fine."

"… ? What do you mean?"

"It's going to be the same no matter what you do. It will be a problem if you underestimate us demons. At our call, forget reaching the human world, you wouldn't manage to even leave this island."

"I see. If ye will go even to the extent of confining us, beyond doubt it's something very deep. Isn't it, Demon?"

Iris looked at Lilith-san sending daggers with her glance,

"… Why dostn't thou be truthful with us already? The real reason we have come to the Netherworld…"

"… Is that so? Do I not have to keep it secret anymore?"

As if realizing something, Lilith-san slowly started to tell us.

"Frankly speaking, Chiharu-sama's existence is too much of a danger to us.

A chimera between a human and a demon… If that existence reaches public knowledge… The illegal organization that is researching the combination of humans and monsters… It's not like its members will keep quiet.

With your power, as you hold the power of a monster while having a human body, replacing the current humanity with a brand new humanity… It's possible for that unrealistic event to happen."

"…"

I didn't know.

However, If, as Lilith-san says, that kind of underground organization exists, no doubt my very being would be a suitable sample for them.

… Mm, wait.

"Could it be that that organization you say…?"

The mysterious monster tamer I battled the other day crossed my mind.

I recalled Noelle, who, while being a human, had the power of a monster.

“It’s as Chiharu-sama has guessed. The Black Tamers… Those guys are the leading people in researching the merging of humans with monsters.”

“…”

Is that so?

So it was like that…!!?

It looks like I have tied together everything about the doubts that were haunting me until now.

The reason the Black Tamers came for us so desperately.

And, about the monster tamer I battled before. The reason that Noelle held the ability to turn her own body into a monster.

If we think that all of that is because of their research, everything that happened up till now comes together.

“I’ve understood the reason why I can’t return to the human world.

However… Why now? If you simply wanted to trap me at the Netherworld… You should have done it earlier.”

“That’s right. If, like up until now, Chiharu-sama’s secret was safe, you could be allowed to keep living at the human world, but… Regrettably, that cannot be.”

“So that means… The secret has been leaked somewhere?”

“Yeah. Are we talking about 3 months ago? An unauthorized access to the database managed by the IMA was confirmed. What’s more… As the culprit held internal privileges, we didn’t discover it until recently…”

"…So it was like that."

Speaking about three months ago, that's around the same time I received on my cell the mail from the IMA.

Come to that, could it be that my being chosen as a monster tamer and the leakage of my information from the IMA database are connected somehow!?

"Erm… Lilith-san…"

So, the moment after I was about to voice my doubt.

Suddenly, the sound of a siren resounded inside the room.

At first, I thought that a small fire had started, but it seems that it's not that.

The sound of the siren, rather than from inside the hotel… Seems to be coming from outside the building.

"Head maid… It's an emergency!"

The one who appeared before us was a maid who was breathing roughly, and her countenance surmised that "what happened is no trivial matter".

"What is it!?"

"An enemy attack! The opponent is likely the Black Tamers… They number 30… No, more like 50! Before the enemy charge, our defensive lines are on the verge of collapsing. Some of them have infiltrated already."

"… Is that a mistake? This island, entirely covered with a summon forbidding field, should have perfect counter terrorist defenses."

"About that… The enemy wields a strange skill that lets them change their own body into a monster… They don't seem to mind the summon forbidding field in the least."

A shadow fell over Lilith-san's face,

"… How stupid. Do they plan on repeating the same error as ten years ago?"

"Erm… What the heck is happening on this island? Besides, just now… Black Tamers…"

"It seems that we don't have the time to explain it properly. Chiharu-sama… Leave from here at once."

Right after Lilith-san commanded me so.

There was a creaking noise of broken glass.

As we looked at the source of the noise, from outside the broken window, a single giant monster entered the hotel.

That monster was shaped like a wolf with lovely black hair & huge fangs.

"Yoh… Long time no see. I was looking forward for the day to come for me to exert my revenge against you… Kusumi-kun!"

"…"

Wh-who's this guy…

I'm sorry, but I don't remember having met any werewolf.

"Haha! You can't guess with this shape? Don't worry, will you remember me once we start to fight!?"

After spewing that sentence, the wolf monster swung down its paws against me.

It's definitely not a move I can't react against, but… I didn't dare to evade it.

"Excuse me!"

Why?… Since, for starters, I didn't feel that there was a need to evade.

As soon as the werewolf identified me as its target, Zonmi, ready for combat, fended off the attack with her umbrella.

"… Tch. You again, bitch? Thanks for taking care of me back then. Ghoul womaaan!"

"I remember this face from somewhere… The man who we battled before that used a Minotaur… Is that you?"

"On the mark! I'm glad that you remember me!

Haha! This time it won't be like last time! Ill show you the might of me, who's called the strongest among Seconds!"

"…"

Is it… A joke…?

This werewolf's true identity… Is the black suited Black Tamer I battled before?

The shocking thing is that it's not part of his body.

The Black Tamers' members have genuinely… Completed their research to turn a human into a monster!?

… Though that was a surprise, it's not like I'll show my agitation to the enemy.

I have to show to them a composed smile.

"Can you allow yourself to look away? I too have strengthened my battle power."

"… Haah? Bastard, what are you… Guah!?"

Receiving a severe blow on his flank, the werewolf rose a dull moan.

"Haru… I'll protect you!"

Kyouko's dropkick from the side had enough strength to send flying the large build of the werewolf.

From the start, in battle power alone, Kyouko can suitably be called the strongest of our members.

And in addition to that, because of making a contract with me, that destructive power has grown and become something fearsome.

"If you forget about Manami, you'll regret it♪"

Saying that, Manami dynamically threw a pair of huge kitchen knives in a boomerang fashion.

"… Uugh!?"

That strength surprisingly seemingly being nothing to make light of, with the knives stuck to his forehead, the werewolf let out a big moan and one of his knees touched the ground.

"… Keh! Isn't a surprise attack bad manners?!

However, I didn't expect it… For you bastard of a rookie to so quickly… Contract three monsters…"

"…"

I'm very sorry for the misunderstanding.

You may not believe me when I say this to you, but… My sister is not a monster.

"… I beg you fall back a bit."

"Eh!! But it's fine. Can Manami fight? If Manami uses her girl power, monster or whatever, won't he fall in one punch?"

"It bothers me that you think that's fine!"

As I remarked that to her, Manami, *GUFUFU*, let out an unpleasant laughter,

“Humf♡ There’s no way.

Oniichan can’t help but worryingly worry about Manami♪

Kyaaah♡ Could it be that Manami… Is being loved!?”

“… Yup. Since it’s a pain in the ass, let’s leave it like that.”

Somehow managing to make my sister leave the front lines, I let out a sigh.

The werewolf, having heard our conversation from the start to the end, let out a composed laugh,

“Haha! How surprisingly easygoing. Thanks to your long conversation, bastards, I too could finish my preparations.”

“!?”

Looking to where the man’s gaze pointed at, there were five giant flight-type monsters, six, seven… One by one they could be seen coming here from outside the window.

Each and every of those guys was shaped like a bird or an insect, and like this, they were closing the distance with us.

This is bad.

No matter how strong Zonmi and the rest are, we can’t stand up to these numbers by normal means.

Now all of us have to cooperate…

When I made that judgment and looked around, I suddenly noticed something.

—I couldn’t see Iris anywhere.

“… Don’t tell me!?”

The worst possibility crossed my mind.

How careless.

That's right. Hearing news about the Black Tamers, how could Iris keep doing nothing? I dare say that Iris, right now… To exert her revenge, there's no doubt that she must have taken the absurd action of going by herself.

… As I was thinking that, the flight-type monsters entered the hotel one after another.

The man laughed loudly,

"Haha! Now things have changed! You'd do better surrendering like this, you bastard."

"…"

It seems that, as expected, the objective of the Black Tamers is me.

It looks like they want to use my body to further their research.

"… Chiharu-sama."

Lilith-san called my name.

Before I knew it, she has brought heavily armed maids, ready for the battle.

"Their objective is you. This place, how about… You leave this place to us? Chiharu-sama, please head to the underground passage I showed you the other day."

"… Understood."

"We apologize for our difficult to accept request. You're worried about the safety of Zonmi-sama and the rest, right? However, be relieved. If we stabilize the front lines, they can go after you… Erm. I beg your pardon. Could you please repeat to me what I've just said?"

"You said to leave this place to you."

"… Yes?"

"Take care of Zonmi and the rest."

"Eh, errrm… Yes. You can surely leave it in our hands."

That I complied with the two answers may have been quite surprising to her.

Lilith-san was confused for a while with a face that said "there's something I don't quite understand".

… I better leave before she becomes aware.

Of course, this time, I won't comply in the least with what Lilith-san has said.

I have one thing I must do.

To retrieve Iris, who has gone to fight alone, and save her from her pinch.

After all… I promised her that night.

If you ever fall into a pinch, no matter what kind… I'll definitely go to save you!

I'm worried about the safety of Zonmi and the lot, but since the enemy's objective is my body, exiting the hotel will make them be safer.

With a strengthened decision, after sneaking out of the room, in order to search for Iris, I ran to outside the hotel.

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Vigorously rushing out of the hotel, searching for Iris was difficult.

If I had at least made a contract with her, I could have used the thread of magic power that comes out from the ring to choose the shortest way, but… Even if I complain now, it's no use.

Instead, I could find along the way charred black monster bodies.

Could it be perhaps… That Iris had been battling here?

Though I may have left her behind, I reached that conclusion by putting together those tiny clues.

As I approached the town's center, the frequency at which I found charred black monsters went up.

Surely… Iris must be near.

After walking for a while, *SHBROOOM!*, from the town's center came a noise like that of breaking concrete.

"Iris!"

I could easily spot Iris, turned into her red dragon form.

Iris, with her body conspicuously buried into the wall at the top of a building, looks to be clearly worn out from consecutive battling.

"GROAAAAAAAAR!"

After taking flight by extending her wings, Iris let out a roar that made the earth tremble.

"Kyaha♡ Don't hide, lizard-chan. I'm going to lovingly tease you a bit."

The person Iris is against is a very familiar face.

The monster tamer I engaged in battle some time ago, who could turn her body into a golem.

Noelle North Norm.

Contrasting with Iris, whose face was easily readable, Noelle's countenance was frighteningly cold. It was as if she enjoyed the death match like a game… That kind of madness could be felt.

Slash.

After being provoked, Iris flew up front in Noelle's direction.

However, Noelle easily stopped that attack by transforming both her arms into those of a golem.

Looking from the side, the figure of a girl skillfully making use of a pair of rocky arms five times her size was beyond weird.

"No, no♪ Attacks like those won't work on me."

Noelle grabbed Iris by the tail and turned her around.

Making use of that impulse, she tossed her against a building.

"Gyaaaaaaah."

Iris, being thrown again against the concrete of a building with frightening strength, let out a fearsome roar.

… I couldn't look.

After that, Iris faced Noelle again and again… It seems that the other side has mostly grasped her battle skills.

Iris's attacks were focused on her inborn speed, but her fangs not reaching her enemy, she was at her wits' end before the continuous counterattacks.

… I understand.

It seems that my "somehow or other, I want to save you" only hurt Iris.

However.

How could I have thought that Iris had abandoned us at the hotel?… She never did so.

So to speak, this… Is her personal battle.

… Until now, Iris's objective of attaining revenge, instead of denying or accepting it… I adopted an uncertain attitude.

Since, after all, I had one-sidedly decided that there was no way I could understand this girl's feelings, all alone after losing her family.

Thinking about her, I mostly tried not to butt into her way.

Perhaps… No, absolutely… Iris won't be glad that I get roped in her battle.

Even so, should I go help her?

Even so, should I get in the way of her way of life?

"Even so… I…"

My decided course of action on a limited situation was that Iris… I don't want to lose an important person, those were my honest feelings.

"Iris… You can't looooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooose!"

Before I knew, I was shouting.

In honest truth… I don't know if my voice reached her, seething with rage.

Nevertheless.

This may be no more than wishful thinking, but…

I felt that Iris's eyes recovered some of its vitality.

"Groaaaaaaar!"

Mustering the strength of her whole body, Iris spewed her scorching breath against Noelle.

The breath she spewed in large quantities was so powerful that its heat reached even here.

“… Good, this is it!”

I was confident of Iris’s victory, but just after that.

Noelle let out a composed laugh.

“Kyahaha♪ Fire is not effective against rock!”

Making full use of her golem arms, Noelle was skillfully drowning out the breath that came down.

Besides the impregnable defensive wall that were the huge palms made of rock, Iris’s breath turned completely ineffective.

“What the heck…”

Attacking directly is no good. Spitting flames is no good.

In that case… What can Iris do…

And then, something outside expectations happened.

When Iris’s breath stopped, Noelle’s eyes were tinged with surprise.

“The he… The flames were a co…?”

So.

It was not like Iris kept spewing flames just because.

In other words… Though she kept spitting flames in order to obstruct Noelle's sight… She was waiting for the moment her opponent lowered her guard.

It's a simple tactic, but not even Noelle would have expected this action from the single-minded pattern of attacks up until now.

"Wai… No… ! Let me down!"

Picked by her nape by Iris's talons, Noelle was unavoidably dragged into an aerial fight.

From now on, Iris has the control.

Having brought the battle to the sky, Iris became more active, she was in her element, and quickly gained altitude.

Has she reached maybe around 600 meters, I wonder?

Just when Iris's body was smaller than a speck of dust, I could saw a girl falling from the sky on the edge of my vision.

"Iyah!… Kyaaa

It’s no joke.

Let’s assume that Noelle has a body resilience that exceeds mine.

Even then, the damage Noelle has suffered… It’s like trying to do bungee jumping without rope from the top of the Tokyo Skytree.

At the very least, she has to have lost consciousness for a while.

Soon after Noelle’s fall, Iris flapped her wings and gradually started decreasing her altitude.

Has she completely spent all of her magic power?

From that way of acting… A terrible weariness can be perceived, as if she had been fighting for three days and three nights straight without resting.

“Iris!”

Once again, I shouted to Iris.

I noticed the red dragon transformed Iris’s eyes turning to me.

That’s good… It seems that this time my voice has reached her.

“!?”

It was at that time.

Just when I let down my chest with relief.

I noticed Iris’s body becoming smaller and smaller, changing to human form.

Having lost her wings, Iris, pulled by the gravity, started to drop at a terrific speed.

So as to not let her crash against the ground, I moved at top speed.

“…Kuh!”

By a hair’s breadth.

I somehow managed to catch Iris's falling body.

It doesn't look like just a while ago a life or death battle had been taking place. That girl whose little body was snugly resting between my arms… Was your run-of-the-mill young girl.

"… Oi. You alright, Iris!?"

So as to clear away my uneasiness, Iris promptly opened her eyes.

"Monster tamer… I owe thee. Recently… I've often bore human shape. This form is more comfortable."

"I see… As long as you're safe, that's fine. That's good… You're alive… That's really good."

Seeing Iris smiling to me, I noticed something warm filling my chest.

Unable to hold my feelings, tears formed.

Iris, with a bewildered look,

"… Incomprehensible. Why, what need dost thou have to shed tears?"

"Isn't that… an obvious thing? I don't know what you think, but… I think of you as someone as important as my own family.

That's why… You being alive is what makes me happiest…"

"Family… Is it?"

Iris slowly ruminated the meaning of the word,

"I feel that I had long forgotten the meaning of that term. So… Being with thy family gives thee this kind of warmth…"

So as to say she had reached the limit of her energies, Iris, softly buried her face in my chest.

“Sorry. Monster tamer. Lend me thy chest for a bit… Right now, still surrounded by thy warm… I want to rest my body.”

“… Understood.”

When I replied, Iris fell into a deep sleep.

Iris… You’ve given your best.

Let’s leave the fighting back there to Lilith-san and her lot and return to the hotel asap.

At any rate, now… We better leave behind this place even a moment sooner.

Judging that, when I turned back.

From somewhere, came the noise of rubble crumbling.

“Are you… pulling my leg?”

Looking behind me in panic, I could see a ragged and heavily damaged Noelle slowly crawling out of the hole.

That looked like something entirely removed from the realm of reality… An impossible view.

That thing that barely kept human form must have every bone in its body broken. From her arms and abdomen protruded white bones dyed with blood.

Her neck bone had clearly just been broken.

Having lost its support, Noelle’s head… Was slanted in an unnatural angle and wobbled with each of her steps.

Am I imagining things?

I feel that I've seen something like this just recently.

That is… In one scene of last night's movie.

"It hurrrts… Ouch, ouch, ouch,

“We don’t have a family… We are isolated existences made inside test tubes… That’s why…”

Stopping there, Noelle spat a lot of blood from her mouth.

When, worried by her condition, I tried rushing to her, I could feel an uncanny killing intent.

“That’s why I… Will kill you and become a perfect human…”

“You… What are you blabbering…?”

“Level… Over limit.”

Right after Noelle muttered something.

Her whole body was covered by a rocky armor, and then grew.

Raising in volume like mochi over a stove, the clump of rocks became human-like.

Once it finished… There was a huge female golem.

Its length… I’d say, around 40 meters?

It’s obviously by far the hugest monster I’ve met till now.

“Ahaha♡ Hey. Oniichan… Where are you?”

Is it the effect of turning into a monster?

It seemed like Noelle’s voice, turned into a monster, had become quite low.

To add to that, her voice's volume, following her body's size, was as powerful as that of a speaker installed downtown.

"Ahaha♡ Hey. Oniichan… Are you there?"

After making that low voice resound through the whole area, Noelle stomped strongly under her feet.

That instant. The sound of cracking asphalt was made.

"… Ku!"

Frankly, I thought I'd die.

Holding Iris in my arms, I suffered a tremor stronger than any earthquake I've ever experienced.

"… It's no joke."

By no means can I picture how to defeat the current Noelle.

Is it good or bad luck?

As you see, Noelle, by transforming her whole body into a monster, it seems that she has obtained overwhelming power, but… It looks like, in compensation, her sight has weakened.

… In any case, right now I have to flee.

No sooner than I had decided that, I turned back.

While somehow holding Iris in my arms, I managed to slip through Noelle's field of vision and entered an abandoned building.

"Ahaha♪ Come out♪ Hey… Come ooooooooooooooooooooooooout!"

She repeatedly and indiscriminately destroyed and shouted.

It seems that Noelle hasn't found me yet.

"… Moron. Stop it."

It's not like I can win.

I kept repeating that to myself again and again in my head.

Have you seen that chick's strength? What the heck… Isn't she a *bona fide* freak?

For now, while you pray that, like this, Noelle goes somewhere else, hold your breath and stick to the plan.

However.

This… May be no more than my personally convenient assumption.

I feel that if I flee from here… Perhaps, no one will save her for the rest of her life.

"Ahaha♡ Oniichan… Where are you—?"

I felt like Noelle's voice kept growing fainter and fainter.

It may be broken now… But the building isn't moving away from here.

In any case, it doesn't change the fact that it's a desperate situation…

"… I'll do it."

Certainly the foe's strength is mighty.

My chances of winning like this may be dim.

However, Noelle isn't perfect.

On the contrary… It seems that I can take advantage of the cracks in her unstable mentality.

It's fine… It's not like I don't have a chance.

If I fight by making sure of the situation, I'll definitely make a breakthrough!

What's more… This is a method I didn't want to use if possible.

Come the worst… If I act as a diversion to attract the opponent's attention, it won't be difficult to save Iris's life.

"Iris… Sorry. I'll return soon."

Lying down Iris on one of the abandoned building's sofas, I dashed to the building's stairs.

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Thinking about it, this is my first battle since I'm self-conscious of the Demon blood half that runs through my veins.

I… am different from regular people.

So, being aware of it, things that until now I thought were impossible became doable.

For example, jumping power.

The me right now can move from rooftop to rooftop of buildings of nearly 10 meters of height by jumping with calm and composure.

Faster… Even one second faster… I must go to her.

If I leave Noelle by herself… The town may end up as rubble. If that happens, Iris's life would be in danger. Inside the buildings, there may be frightened people that were late to take refuge.

That's why, I… I must appear before her once again.

"Kyahaha♪ Hey… Onii-chan… Where are you?"

"Noelle! I'm here! I won't flee nor hide! So… Stop doing this!"

"Hey… Where… Where are you?"

“That’s why… Since I’m here…”

“Shut uuuu

Up till now, Noelle, no matter what pinch she was in, she hadn't transformed her full body into a monster.

Despite, when thinking in simple attack power, being stronger this way, she was obstinate in not doing that.

It seems to make much more sense to think that the reason was "since when transforming the whole body into a monster, conscious control becomes impossible".

… So, What do I do?

On top of not having any hope to solve this through dialogue, there's no chance in the least to win this by attacking up front.

Nevertheless, having reached this point, showing the back to my opponent is out of question.

In that case… There's just one thing I can do.

To drain Noelle's internal magic power till the last drop.

If I keep dodging her attacks, in time surely Noelle´s magic power should become empty.

In theory, it's the same that happened earlier when Iris returned from red dragon to human shape.

In this way, surely… There's no doubt that I can tame her.

"!?"

Noelle once again swung down her iron hammer.

However, this time I could evade the attack with quite the composure.

With all of her body transformed into a monster, there's no doubt that Noelle, hides an abnormal power enough to level the whole town, but in exchange her attacks become, in a word, monotone.

Like this… If I pay attention to my opponent's actions, I may be able to dodge all of Noelle's attacks until I leave her without magic power.

Just when I held that hope, something out of expectations happened.

The world trembled.

For an instant, I couldn't comprehend what had happened.

It seems that, centered in just protecting my body, I wasn't cautious about what I was using as a foothold.

How careless.

Noelle happens to have means to attack me besides direct contact.

Namely, by crushing the building I'm using as a foothold.

Being at my wits' end after completely losing my footing by Noelle's low kick, my body was tossed into the air.

SLASH

Aiming at me, as I became unable to move in mid-air, putting all of her body weight into her palm, Noelle squashed my body.

"… Gaha!?"

Definitely… With this… I died.

Anyhow, have I not been crushed flat by a stone giant with a body nearly 30 times mine?

Nevertheless.

Unexpectedly, I was still living.

… No, thinking better, is it that unexpected?

Actually, now it's not like I couldn't imagine something like this.

However, I feel anxious.

That is… In what shape has my body been left after such an attack.

… There's no way I believe that I'm alive and in tip-top condition.

Surely right now my body looks like a fun sticker.

I timidly open my eyes.

What will it be?

…

What the heck… What's this…?

Let alone becoming a sticker, my body looks reddish brown and swollen.

I could hear directly in my ears my heart beating strongly.

My body feels hot. It's like… I'm soaking in boiling water.

Is it my imagination?

I feel… Like I have experienced this feeling before.

That time, if I'm not wrong… My body was controlled by the magic power that engulfed me and, like that, my consciousness flew away.

Hey… Wait…?

Consciousness flying away… This situation… Isn't it just like Noelle right now!?

Let's say that the power of a strong monster is something that swallows human consciousness… That would explain what happened to my body last time I fought Noelle.

In that case… I can't let the magic power engulf me like this.

Keep conscious.

Don’t let the darkish magic power that surges from the depths of your body engulf you.

For what reason have I come here?

That’s… To protect Iris… To protect this town.

This power that sleeps inside my body… It’s definitely not for harming anybody, nor for destroying anything.

It’s for protecting the people I care for!

Thus, being aware of that, I could feel my temperature going down and my body steadily becoming lighter. The darkish red and swollen skin was returning to its original condition… Instead, I realized that my hair was growing.

“Uoh!?”

After that, two bat-like wings grew from my back and tore my T-shirt.

Could this be… My true shape as a monster!?

Since I can’t see my whole body reflection on a mirror, I can’t be sure, but… Maybe leaving out growing wings and my hair lengthening, It doesn’t seem like I’m very different from a regular human.

Although the changes in my appearance may be scarce… The power that seethes inside is unimaginable.

Oddly enough, this appearance… Seemed to resemble that of the late Maou that Lilith showed to me at that underground room in the hotel.

“Uwaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

As soon as Noelle confirmed my survival, letting out a strange voice, she swung down her fist again.

However, this time… It didn't look so frightening.

It's like a human not fearing the attack of a wild rabbit… Having gained an overwhelming power, I could easily stop the attack.

"!?"

Maybe she thought I couldn't stop her attack. I saw a tinge of impatience in the turned into a monster Noelle's countenance.

"Gu!…"

It may be because of the difference in body complexion, but the other side's attack was unexpectedly powerful.

It was so mighty that even I, having obtained tremendous strength by controlling my monster power, if I lose focus for a bit, will end up squashed.

Nevertheless.

"The me right now… Won't lose to anyone!"

I rejected Noelle's fist with all my might.

Losing, Noelle lost her balance, I made her mass tumble.

I didn't miss out on that opening.

Without a moment's delay, I took flight by moving my two wings.

At first, I was worrying if I could fly properly, but all it took was mere seconds to get used to it.

I dare say… It's just a guess of mine.

The same that a butterfly that just came out of the cocoon knows how to fly, I may unconsciously know how to use my wings on a genetic level.

Noelle, eager to connect an attack, kept swinging her arms, but those actions looked so slow that even a fly could have stopped them.

Even if we were well matched in power, I had great advantage in speed.

"Doryaaaaaaa!"

Using the impulse of the fall from the sky, I hit Noelle's big frame with a dropkick in the truest sense of the word.

Of course, I didn't make her fall with a single hit, but from here on it's easy game to connect attacks.

After that, piling up a second, a third, a fourth hit, I succeeded in bringing Noelle down with the seventh hit.

It's not that I wouldn't be glad to return to human form at this moment if I could, but…

"GRAAA

"… Wha."

This technique certainly deserves to be called history's most dreadful body press.

If she makes full use of her huge frame that causes shakes like earthquakes with each step… I fear that the whole town will be destroyed.

"… There's no way. Do I have to make myself serious?"

After temporarily landing, I used the momentum to fly up with full force.

And, like that, I kicked her body up with full force.

"Ah, ah, aaaah… Gaha!?"

Successful hit. Under my attack, Noelle's body came apart… Like that, she returned to human form.

If she suffers big damage, that can revert her monster transformation?

It was a long… And relentless battle.

After this, it's just catching Noelle's falling body… Bringing her back to the hotel with Iris, and this battle is finished.

When I return to the hotel, I have a lot of questions to ask her.

About herself… The Black Tamers… And about her monster transformation ability.

I've roughly guessed her landing point.

After this, it's only waiting for her to fall,

…Come to think of it, these 2-3 days have been anything but a display of newly revealed shocking facts.

My mom is a monster tamer.

My sister is only half-related to me, as we are half-siblings with different fathers.

And, above all… The most shocking thing is that my true identity is that of a new monster species born between a human and a demon.

Surely, even now… What I know is just but part of it… There's still a lot of things I should know from here on.

If listening to her helps to that… Then we could say that this battle was very meaningful.

Just when I extended my arms to grab Noelle's body.

A snake.

Suddenly, before me it appeared, the head of a huge snake.

It's length… To tell the truth, I couldn't see it in its entirety.

Sure that thing's head was right before my eyes, but its body stretched far away and I couldn't ascertain the tail.

However, the snake that immediately started to coil around me clearly boasted a size in a league of it's own not comparable even to the fully monster transformed Noelle.

On top of the big serpent's head, a single human could be seen.

… Could it be the monster tamer that has made a contract with the snake monster?

That personage, maneuvering the huge snake, instead of me, grabbed the recently fallen Noelle.

"Ahaha… I knew you'd come… Oneechan…"

She's probably spent all of her internal magic power.

Noelle muttered with a feeble voice like that of an ill person on the verge of death.

As, from here, the figure was against the light, I couldn't discern it well, but the silhouette of the person who embraced Noelle seemed to be that of a woman.

"Ya-ho—. It's been quite a bit too long a while, Chiharu-kun."

The somewhat missed, laid-back tone hints of an adult.

Still riding on top of the snake's head, she gradually came closer… At last, I could clearly grasp her appearance.

"How… Why are you he…"

"Hmmm. All of a sudden, you drop a harsh question. Well… I'll explain it to you in a way easy to understand for you… Nori, is it?" How would I put it, it's that kind of feeling.

That foolish atmosphere as if people were food is characteristic of her.

“Don’t joke with me, answer me properly… Luka-san.”

“Waah. Scaredy-scary. Chiharu-kun… How come you became able to glare like that without my knowing?”

“…”

It’s only natural that I became silent.

The person that appeared before me all of a sudden as a monster tamer is my superior.

“… You have a face of not understanding anything. Good. Then, I’ll specially tell you one thing..”

Starting like that, Luka-san,

“In fact, I, Luka-san~, I’m the one who founded and stands at the top of the Black Tamers. Isn’t that the answer you were looking for?”

“…”

“Arara. Your reaction has been more bland than I expected. Could it be… Chiharu-kun had realized it at some point with his sharp intuition?”

“… Nope. Not in the least. It’s just… I’ve grown accustomed to surprises. Recently there have been many things and I’ve grown tired of reacting to each and every one.”

“Ahaha… By the way, Chiharu-kun.

Sorry, but… It seems that I don’t have the time to rejoice upon our reunion.

You see. According to the reports of my subordinates, aren't they coming sca~ry demon reinforcements very soon?

We've gathered enough data… After successfully retrieving our injured comrades, we can put a finish to this. With the exception of the irregularity called yourself, everything seems to have gone according to my plan."

"… Good for you."

"Thank you. So… Bye, bye, see you later."

Just after saying that.

The big serpent before me slithered.

By the time I noticed that that movement was an offensive action, the surrounding buildings had started to collapse against me at once.

How careless.

As I directed all my attention to the snake's head, I totally missed its body.

Nevertheless.

The me right now won't fall to this kind of attack.

"… She fled?"

Nimbly slipping through the collapsing buildings, extending my wings and flying high, I couldn't perceive the enemy's figure.

It seems that by then, Luka-san and her troupe were already at more than 500 meters from my position… No problem.

If I fly with all my might, surely I could reach them soon.

The instant that I opened my wings again with renewed vigor, I felt terribly dizzy.

My heart pounding strongly, it brought attention to the risk on my body.

Are you… Joking…?

With this timing, I reached my limit…?

Has it been maybe around five minutes since I totally transformed into a monster?

It seems that my limit is around that?

Quite short.

However, thinking about the overwhelming power up till now, it may be a reasonable retribution.

With the unbearable feeling of having let my archenemy escape from under my nose without resistance, I—my consciousness slowly blacked out.

Reptile tribe: Basilisk **LV**: 33

Physical strength: S
Power: S
Speed: A

Legendary snake monster.

Big enough to swallow a whole building.

Expels poison gas and fleeing opponents get turned into stone.

Serial number: 081

Epilogue - Prediction of troubles

After that.

It's been a week since that event.

It seems that, after that battle ended, I was around three days out as if dead.

For that reason, I'm being examined in detail at a hospital recommended by Lilith-san.

Well, being hospitalized isn't such a big thing.

As it's just having X-rays taken a couple of times a day and blood drawn from time to time, and the trio of Zonmi, Kyouko and Manami comes to see me every day, there's no way I could spend all day bored.

By the way, about Iris, after checking that I was hospitalized, it seems that she promptly left the island saying "I have something to do at my hometown".

From what I've heard, the village where Iris lived, since five years ago when it was attacked by the Black Tamers, has thoroughly become a so-called ghost town, so I don't know what kind of business she could have there.

Aah. That's right..

Luka-san was at the top of the Black Tamers.

That revelation has become a tremendous shock both in the Netherworld and in the human world.

They say that high class monster tamers like Luka-san or my mother, there aren't more than ten in the world, and it seems that they boast influence on par of that of the demons.

If it's that kind of super-celebrity… As she's the boss of the very infamous Black Tamers, just picture the extent of the impact of the issue.

… Since thinking only of bad news will sour my mood, let's go with a bright topic.

I don't know the specific details, but it's been decided that we can return to the human world without troubles.

The ones Lilith-san relied on, an anti-Black Tamers corp, seems to have suffered heavy losses on this raid, so this island lacks the battle power to hold back the next terrorist attack.

In any case, well, for that reason there's no motive for us to keep lodging on this island.

Instead, the ones who protected us, who was in fact that International Monster Association, after they take care of some arrangements, it looks like we can return to the human world.

Honestly, I don't know if that's a reason for rejoicing, but in any case I'm glad that now we can return to the human world.

The afternoon of the day before I was scheduled to leave the hospital.

"Now that I think… Hasn't Iris returned yet?"

"Nope. I think that she's about to return, but… She knows that oniichan is hospitalized."

"Good grief. Be it Chiharu or the red dragon, I'd like for you to stop acting by yourselves from now on."

"… How weird, the ghoul and I agree! Truly… That day, when I noticed that Haru had gone by himself to look for Iris-chan, I think my heart stopped!"

"… Sorry."

Well… I've been severely scolded already for that.

When I awakened from my deep slumber, first of all I was awarded with a slap from Zonmi.

Despite me being convalescent, Kyouko hurled me with all her might.

Manami, strange of her, just kept silent… And remained by my side.

Each and every one of them had a different reaction, but the three of them had something in common.

And that was that all three of them had reddened, swollen eyes and were crying.

The reason. For the three days I was out cold, my vitals were so unstable that it wouldn't be weird if I passed away.

No matter how mighty the power I had gained, the effective time was short and above all the risk was too great.

Lilith-san had warned me that until my body gets accustomed to the power of the monster transformation, I should abstain as much as possible from using that power.

I too, if possible, don't want to be involved a second time in a deathmatch that forces me to rely on that power.

As I was thinking about that, someone knocked on the hospital room's door.

"Come in—"

"… Greetings. I'll intrude."

Seeing the person who entered the room with that curt reply, I unconsciously sprang out of the bed.

The one who was there was Iris, who I haven't really seen in a week.

"Iris! Until now… What the heck have you been doing!?"

As I rushed to her side, Iris, looking down in embarrassment,

"… I had gone to retrieve this."

"Errrm… Could this be…"

The thing that Iris solemnly took out from her pocket was a sparkling silver contract ring… like thing, but the appearance was a tad different from those I've seen up till now.

How do I put it, the design is too flashy for a contract ring… It has in places carvings of a dragon.

“A contract ring… Is it?”

“… That’s right. I thought I wouldn’t have use for it in all my life… I had buried it with the remains of my honored mother under the sacred tree, but… It seems I had erred.”

“… But wait. Isn’t it weird what you’ve said?”

“…”

So.

Now it feel like a tale from long ago, but at the very start, Iris expressly stole that ring that was supposed to be sent to my home and forced a contract with me.

If she had a ring since the start, what need did she have to expressly steal it?

“If you had a ring from the start, why didn’t Iris use it?”

Before my question, Iris, pouting and averting her gaze,

“Th-this one… There’s no way I could employ it!

This… Since I was told by my now deceased honored mother that I should give it to the man who will become our lifelong companion… I-it’s for my nuptial!”

“… Eh? What does that mean?”

Leaving me with a question mark over my head, Iris, her cheeks colored with embarrassment, with a resolute face—

Stretching as much as she could, she locked my lips with hers.

“~~~~~!!”

As a boy, I’m not bothered nor disgusted by it, but… By the way, that was my first kiss.

“These are my feelings. Monster tamer… Why dostn’t thou have a child with me?”

“… Wh-what?”

This is… This is a bombshell announcement.

“I too, that night… When thou proposedst to me, I got to think about many things.

Of course I plan to reap retribution against the Black Tamers, but is that my only mission in life? There’s nothing the retribution can do for my brethren.

To leave children behind and lead once again the red dragon clan to prosperity… With that one other mission I have as the one left behind… Well… It made me start to think.”

“…”

This is bad.

And what is bad… Is not that Iris seems to have greatly misunderstood my words, but the surrounding girls, with faces like a seething kettle, who are really on the verge of exploding.

“Chiharu… What the heck is this?… Why don’t you explain yourself clearly?”

“No… I honestly don’t…”

“Chiharu, what the heck… Big-breasted women or petite women… Which of them is your type? Be clear, please!”

“Why would that matter!?”

“Ahahahahahahaha. Haru kissed… Right before me… Ahahahaha. Propose? Booom! I… Booom!”

“Y-you may be my best buddy, Iris-chan, but I absolutely won’t forgive you for this!

Grrrr! Haven’t I told you that oniichan’s and Manami’s virginities are one and the same thing by law!?”

“Co-cool down, girls!! Don’t you find all this chaos weird!?”

“The one who has to cool down is Chiharu! You… Lolicon maou!”

Zonmi’s yell echoed throughout the not very spacious hospital room.

It’s good to see them so lively, but… Why don’t you take a bit into account the TPO?

With this, I’ve fulfilled my aim to make contracts with all three of my initially selected monsters, but…

“… So then, monster tamer. After the baby-making kiss right now… Ahem, after having concluded the ceremony… Shouldn’t we go out to search for the monster they call “stork”?”

“…”

When I think about what will happen from now on… My stomach starts to hurt.